



The Ambassador.

Frontispiece.]

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BEATRICE OF VENICE

*A ROMANCE OF THE LAST DAYS
OF THE VENETIAN REPUBLIC AND
OF NAPOLEON'S CAMPAIGN IN ITALY*

✓ BY
MAX PEMBERTON

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK DADD, R.I.

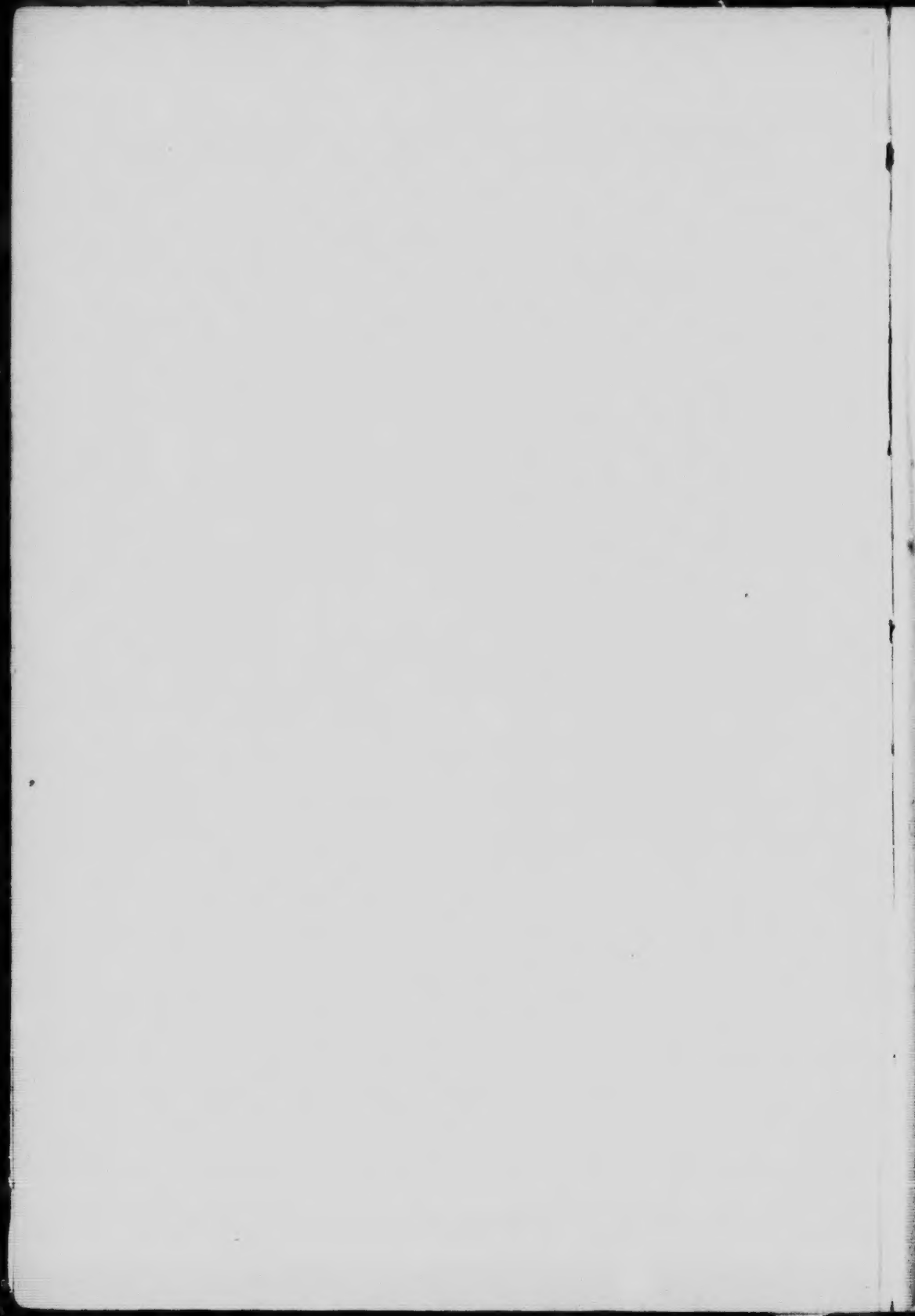
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CONTENTS

PART I.—*VENICE*

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
THE GARRET AND THE ROSE	I
CHAPTER II.	
THE LORD OF BRESCIA	13
CHAPTER III.	
A DOUBLE DOOR OF BRONZE	25
CHAPTER IV.	
AT THE CASA DEGLI SPIRITI	37
CHAPTER V.	
THE FRIEND OF THE FRIEND	56

	PAGE
CHAPTER VI.	
THE ATTACK	66
CHAPTER VII.	
GASTON DECIDES	78
CHAPTER VIII.	
THE STRANGE REWARD OF DILIGENCE	94
CHAPTER IX.	
THE YOUNG MAN BERNADINE	108
CHAPTER X.	
TWO WHITE LAMPS	129
CHAPTER XI.	
THREE DAYS AFTERWARDS	145
CHAPTER XII.	
PAUL DA PONTE	156
CHAPTER XIII.	
À MORT	173
CHAPTER XIV.	
FLIGHT	193

CONTENTS

v

PAGE

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEATH OF LAUGIER 204

CHAPTER XVI.

FAREWELL 220

PART II.—*VERONA*

CHAPTER XVII.

UPON THE ROAD TO PADUA 229

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE AMBASSADOR 246

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ADVOCATE 254

CHAPTER XX.

THE OTHER WOMAN 262

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GLOVE IS THROWN DOWN 276

CHAPTER XXII.

A QUESTION OF HONOUR!. 291

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXIII.	
AT THE BERNESE PALACE	301
CHAPTER XXIV.	
THE ESCAPE	312
CHAPTER XXV.	
THE MEETING IN THE CHURCH	329
CHAPTER XXVI.	
THE COUNTERPLOT	342
CHAPTER XXVII.	
THE GUARD IS TURNED OUT	351
CHAPTER XXVIII.	
THE MASTER PROPHET	365
CHAPTER XXIX.	
DOOM	371
CHAPTER XXX.	
THE GATES ARE CLOSED	383
CHAPTER XXXI.	
THE MOMENTOUS HOUR	416

ILLUSTRATIONS

THE AMBASSADOR	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
JOSEPH VILLETARD COUNSELS PRUDENCE	4
A ROSE UPON THE PAVEMENT	30
THE RENDEZVOUS OF THE WHITE ROSE	40
A MAN WE COULD VERY WELL DO WITHOUT	62
GASTON MEETS HIS CAPTOR	83
THE BEGUILING OF LORENZO	127
ON THE WAY TO MAESTRE	141
CAPTAIN PAUL EXERCISES HIS AUTHORITY	166
A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS	182

	PAGE
GOVERNOR BALLAND EXPLAINS THE SITUATION .	279
GASTON FINDS HIMSELF IN BIANCA'S HOME .	294
GIOVANNI REVEALS THE PLOT	347
THE MESSAGE	377
THE AMBUSCADE BY THE RIVER	394
BEATRICE PLEADS FOR VENICE	422

PART I.—*VENICE*

CHAPTER I

THE GARRET AND THE ROSE

"SO, there is a woman after all."

Gaston, Comte de Joyeuse, utterly surprised to hear a voice in the room, flung the red rose down upon the coverlet of his bed and turned a flaming cheek to the speaker.

"You, Villetard—you in Venice?"

"No other, my dear fellow, but Joseph Villetard arrived this instant from Maestre. Well, are you not glad to see me? Ah, my dear Gaston, my dear boy."

The men embraced with the warmth of a friendship which, for long months, had been but a memory; and a dozen questions asked but unanswered passing between them, the elder at length removed his cloak, and began to cast a quick eye about the shabby room which the young Count had made his home since he came to Venice three months ago.

"The General is at Gratz," he said as he moved; "your letters have interested him, but they are too

vague, my friend. This is no work for the hussars ; he has come to see that, and so I am here—in your little dovecote, Gaston, where the red rose blushes. Ha, ha, say nothing—I count each petal a story, every thorn a rebuff. Where would Joseph Villettard be this day but for the women ? A common scrivener, my boy, a lawyer's hack, a one-windowed gaolbird with quills for his fetters. No, God bless them, I love the women. We are nowhere without them. You have done very well—I shall say so to the General."

"Better say nothing," retorted Gaston, a little curtly ; "this woman won't help you, Villettard. There—that's all—you are thirsty, tired, hungry. We'll have old Crook-Back up and try his wine of Cyprus. You can tell me your news while you eat. Remember, I've seen no one but official messengers for a month or more. It's a cursed exile, and I'm tired of it."

Villettard had already noticed his friend's lassitude and weariness, but his shrewd judgment refused to ascribe it to that confidential mission with which the Count had been entrusted in Venice ; nor did he believe that any common *affaire du cœur* would wring as much as a single sigh from the hard heart of a travelled hussar. Some graver matter troubled the Count, and of this it should be his instant business to learn.

"Yes," he said, "a man may weary even in a marble city. I think I understand, Gaston. And this is no good hope of dreams for one of your age. What sent you to such a garret, my boy ? Is there

no decent inn in Venice, then? Is it money, wisdom—what? They told me you were——”

Gaston put his fingers to his lips, and Jean Mareau, the landlord of the “White Lion,” stood bowing before him. A Frenchman to the fingertips, Venice, nevertheless, had played the deuce with Mareau’s tongue, and so sharpened his avarice that, by the common saying, he would have sold his own mother to the devil for a scudo. Bent as a bow, with sagging jaw and a parrot’s beak, he now washed his hands in imaginary waters (the need of something more substantial being evident), and declared his pleasure to see one of his own countrymen.

“Excellency, I knew the boot upon the stair. None but a hussar walks like that——”

Nell said, Monsieur Jean—and since I am not a hussar——”

“Pardon, Excellency—had you permitted me to finish I would have said none but a hussar walks like that except it be a dragoon. The step was that of my lord Count’s friend. I need no other surety. These are strange times in Venice, gentlemen, strange times for my countrymen; but here you are as safe as in your own house.”

“In which case I should be a dead man before the morning. Come, Monsieur Mareau, that’s a poor beginning, and if your wine be no better——”

“My wine, Excellency, shall speak for itself. His Holiness has named it the wine of Galilee. If that be not enough——”

“Agreed, agreed, Monsieur Mareau, his Holi-

ness's wine and plenty of it. And upon that a mullet or a capon and one of your golden cheeses with a little flask from Zara. Eh, Monsieur Mareau, am I not an artist?"

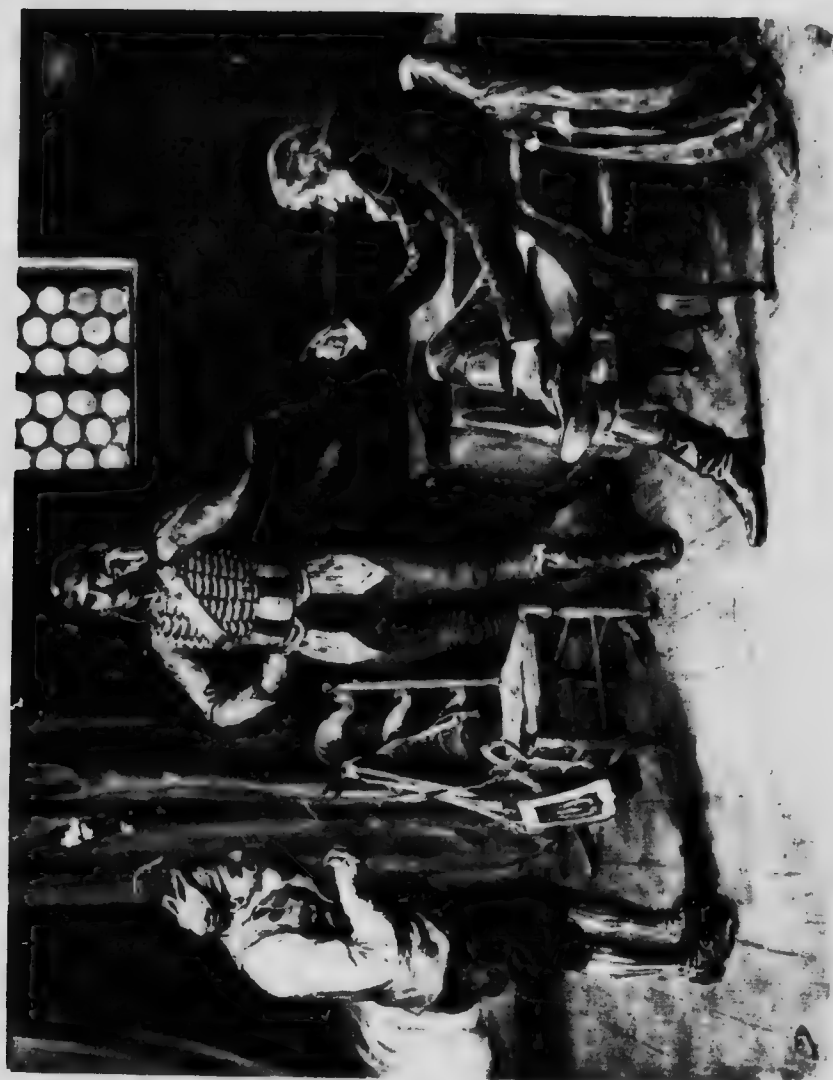
Mine host shrugged his shoulders, and with a gesture of deep distress admitted that the artist was there, but that the canvas was lacking.

"Excellency," he declared, "though you carried a skinful of ducats from Brescia to Maestre, you shall not find a capon for your pains. My countrymen have many virtues, but abstinence is not one of them. They have eaten the very leaves off the trees. Ah! my poor Venice!"

"Your poor Venice, Mareau?"

"That is to say, my glorious country, Excellency, which has filled this beautiful land of Italy with devils. And, saving your Excellency's presence, I would say the same to General Bonaparte if I had the honour to stand before him this day."

"The honour shall be yours, Mareau—I promise you no long delay. Let every one know it in this house—the gentlemen that were playing a little game of *écarté* as I came up the stairs. Let them know that General Bonaparte will ask how they have dealt with my friend the Count here—and with me, Mareau, a traveller that has some little acquaintance with the General. Do you understand? Then, away with you, my man. Go—and mark ye, Mareau, prudence, and upon that prudence, and again I say unto you prudence; or, as heaven is above me, this house shall first burn when my master comes to Venice."



Joseph Villet and counsels of prudence

Joseph Villetard knew precisely the value of a threat and when it might be properly employed. A tried master of intrigue, he had all moods at his command, could be gallant before women, honey-tongued to men, persuasive, accommodating, even humble in his art; but opposition or circumstance could reveal another side less amiable and often unaccountably passionate. Old Mareau, the landlord, remained dumb before the threat, but his lifeless eyes were lighted for an instant while he listened, and his first words in the kitchen below were to summon his assistants and to send a message to the Capo del Sestiero that one of Bonaparte's emissaries had arrived from Gratz, and was then dining in his house.

"And you others," he cried to a loitering crowd of bravos, "up to the leads. Lose no word of it. He comes from General Bonaparte—he has said so himself. If you value your ears, use them, my children. Prudence, and again I say unto you prudence. He has threatened me, Jean Mareau, his countryman. I will teach him with whom he has to deal."

Quite unconscious of the annoyance which the excellent Mareau suffered, and greatly interested in his friend Gaston's story, Joseph Villetard meanwhile had drawn a chair to the window of the little room, and there was pressing the Count for news, both of the city and himself. A slim, awkward figure at the best, the searching beams of light and the deeper shadows behind them played odd tricks with Villetard's scanty locks, and

showed the angular head in all its quaint ugliness of dress and shape. No sharper contrast between two men could have been found in all Venice that day; the spring of age, the summer of youth, the man of the salon, the soldier of the camp, such was the brief verdict an observer might have passed upon Villetard, the emissary, and Gaston, the Hussar. And in their talk they did not disturb these impressions, for while the words of one were weighed as gold in a balance, so was the other impulsively loquacious and quite indifferent to the consequences of indiscretion.

"Your landlord is an impostor, and that is a bad beginning," Villetard resumed so soon as the door was shut. "How did you come here, Gaston—what made you choose this house? The General will ask me why, and I must make him a satisfactory answer. It would never do to let him think that his servants are careless—I am sure you have some good reason? Let me hear it before we go any further."

Gaston drew a chair to the window and looked out over the busy canal, away toward the Giudecca and the South. It was midday and a winter sun shone coldly upon the dome of the Salute and caught up ripples of light from the falling waters. Upon the piazza at the canal's edge doleful players in a moribund Carnival raised droning cries, like a dirge for the misfortunes of their city and the misery that had come upon it. Gondolas passed swiftly, carrying their messages to and from the palace as though the fate of Venice might yet be

decided by their diligence—but everywhere a pall of doubt lay heavy upon the people and it cowed the children to silence.

"I lodge here," said Gaston, turning from the window as from some spectacle which bore no marks gave him pleasure, "I lodge here, my dear Villetard, for two reasons—the first, because its poverty is a cloak; the second, because my landlord is a Frenchman but a French rogue, and, therefore, one who has removed from his Italian neighbours. It is quite true that his friends are listening at this moment to every word which is passing between us; but the same delicate attention without that measure of control which nationality demands, would be more dangerous, and so I suffer it. As to the poverty of the house——"

But Villetard did not give him the opportunity to reply. He was already upon his feet, examining the shabby room with an eye long trained in espionage.

"You suffer them to spy upon you, Gaston?"

"Assuredly I do; would they be happy if I did not?"

"Yes, but your own business, the General's affairs——"

"Oh, I transact my business in a gondola, Villetard; it is safer."

He laughed softly, as though pleased with the obvious lie which he uttered for the benefit of eavesdroppers. Villetard, however, was very far from satisfied, and he continued to examine the room with a searching eye, tapping the walls, peering into closets, and even opening the inner

doors to be sure that no one listened there. Much mystified both by the soundness of the brickwork and the apparent difficulty of espionage, he would have resumed his seat, and continued to press his argument, but for some sound as of a heavy body falling in the garrets above ; and at this he looked up swiftly, and, detecting an aperture at the base of the hook from which a puny glass chandelier depended, he thrust his sword twice into the ceiling thereabouts and then withdrew it, white with plaster upon which a crimson stain was spreading.

"There is the link in your armour, Gaston," he said quietly. "Listen to them. The rats are running, you hear, and one is wounded. Go on, my dear fellow, we can now speak freely."

A low groan from the garret above answered Villetard's taunt ; the scurrying feet moved heavily, and the witnesses to sudden agitation added the fallen plaster to their number. The emissary laughed lightly at his own work ; he had played the part too often, that this page of it should surprise him.

"An ear at the keyhole is never dangerous, my dear Gaston," he continued, "if you have elbow room to cut at it. Those fellows have gone to find a surgeon. You surely would not tell me that you are in any way concerned about them. Oh, come, this is not the Gaston de Joyeuse I have known. What ! You turn pale and start because—because——"

Villetard paused, as though some new idea had come to him. For an instant—for just one—he

linked the story of the red rose upon the coverlet of the bed with that of the young Count's perturbation and evident distress. But, in truth, Gaston de Joyeuse was not thinking of the "White Lion" at all, nor of that which was passing within it. His eyes had been fixed upon a distant gondola which swept by the Dogana on its way towards Rialto; and he told himself that Beatrice, Marquise de St. Remy, had just left the palace and was returning to the Casa degli Spiriti, or, it might be, to the house of her kinsman, the Lord of Brescia. Villetard's momentary hesitation angered him, and he betrayed more animation than he had yet shown in the presence of his guest.

"My dear Villetard, you have not come to Venice to talk nonsense. Really, you excite yourself about very little things. I am so accustomed to all this, it has become second nature to me. I provide against it; that is all. If the French are to remain in Venice——"

"If—if—will the General like your 'if,' Gaston?"

"Permit me to finish, Villetard. If the French are to remain here and their lives are to be accounted of as much worth as that of any dog that guards a kitchen, a man must put up with something more than eavesdropping. He must be patient, conciliatory, and alive to the customs of the people. These Venetians are all spies—sons on fathers, husbands on wives; the police everywhere, every corner a trap, every alley a dangerous place—does it not all come to this, that we must accept it or go; fall in with the common practice or admit that

Venice is untenable? I have seen that from the first. When the General sent me to protect the interests of France, he knew the risks we were running. I will give my account when the time comes, but meanwhile, I say to you, act prudently, and if you have anything to say, say it where every one can hear you and where no one will listen. Come, we will go to Florian's and drink coffee. You will find some of our countrymen there—such as have lived through it, Villetard. They are not many—it has been a dreadful time, my friend, and some of us had begun to think that the General had forgotten us."

"He never forgets, Gaston. I am here to tell you so. Be sure of one thing—they shall be avenged; the humblest servant of France shall not be forgotten in our bill. A heavy total, Gaston, a terrible total when a Bonaparte adds it up."

He gathered up his cloak and they quitted the house together in the Count's gondola, which ferried them across the canal and left them upon the steps of the Piazzetta. Short as the journey was, it yet sufficed for the *sotto-voce* curses of the boatmen, and more than one insulting epithet from the cabin of a passing gondola. In the great square itself, men drew their cloaks about their breasts when the hated Franchese passed, and women stepped aside into porch or doorway to avoid the more open expression of their contempt—a feminine display of annoyance which greatly amused the self-satisfied Villetard.

"No roses here, Gaston," he exclaimed, staring

offensively at his pretty enemies. "Nothing but the thorns, you see. Well, some people will find them sharp by and by. Is this the famous Florian's? Ha! then we will make ourselves at home. Did you say that I should find Chateaudun here! Well, I shall be glad to see him——"

Gaston said "Hush," and looked about him a little anxiously to be sure that no police-spy was in hearing. When the waiter had served them, he leaned upon the table, and making it appear that he was staring with unusual curiosity at the domes of the cathedral, he said very quietly—

"Chateaudun is dead, my dear Villetard. Did not you know it?"

"Dead? Chateaudun? You mean it, Gaston?"

"The: nailed him by the throat to the door of the Frari. The Savi have offered a hundred silver ducats as a reward. It is a colossal sham. They know the hand and kiss it. Then there was Rampeau—thrown like a dog from the Fondaco del Turchi and buried by a fisherman's charity. Sevens dies in church, and they call poison an apoplexy. Richard is murdered in broad daylight in Rialto, and the police say, 'What could we have done?' My blood boils, Villetard, when I think of these things. I wonder that the General leaves one stone of this cursed city standing upon another."

"It suits him to leave it, Gaston. We are at peace with the republic, remember. Peace is a blessing to any country. We burn the farms and eat the corn, and carry away the women on Terra Firma, and it is still peace. The General does not wish for

war with Venice—why, because he is a servant of the people, and the people must rule. In his own good time he will deal with your Doge. I give them three months more, Gaston, three months for your Serene Prince, and your holy candle, and your cap of state, and your sanctified cushion. After that, they will be no more, wiped out like a face from a canvas—forgotten in curses and the people's execration. And those who war against France, your Pesaros, your Faliers—the dotard Lorenzo, Beatrice, my Lady of the Roses—they shall first answer, Gaston, to a rope with a noose in the end of it. What, you are sorry for them? Oh, come, I understand you less than ever."

But this was a lie; for observing the young Count's agitation, the sudden pallor of his face, and the light which had come into his eyes when my Lady Beatrice was mentioned, Villetard arrived at once at a conclusion; and to himself he said—

"She is the woman."

CHAPTER II

THE LORD OF BRESCIA

L●RENZO OF BRESCIA was a man of attitudes, and he flattered himself that the particular pose he adopted upon that day of February, when Beatrice, Marquise de St. Remy, was to hear the fateful news from his lips, was in all things worthy of the style and dignities he maintained in the city. Seated in a great carved chair in a vast room of the Palazzo Burano, pens and ink and costly volumes were set out upon the ivory writing-table before him, while his clothes of purple velvet and the little velvet cap which hid his snow-white crown, were more characteristic of a dandy of twenty than a schemer of fifty-seven ill-lived years. But for that matter, Lorenzo's heart was young, and in his shapely head there were ideas enough to have made the fortunes of an Empire. An intolerably vain man, his power was a woman's, but he would not confess as much even to my Lady Beatrice. "You do much for me," he would say, "but the secret is here"—and he would tap his forehead expressively while my lady laughed in his face and

retorted, "A secret you will keep until your death, my Lord."

There was no doubt whatever that my Lord would do so.

And yet in the gentle art of self-deception this stranger to Venice who had won her confidence so strangely, stood veritably a master. The people accepted him, the Senate, grown old in incapacity, lent him a ready ear. He was named in the clubs and coffee-houses for a wise man. The eloquence of his orations, and the wit of his printed matter delighted the city, which had yet to learn how little they were his own. A splendid head, which might have served for a portrait of the great Tintoret himself, together with a dignity and charm of manner, learned in the Courts of Italy, and chiefly at Rome, were in themselves some passport to the claim of infallibility. Venice, clinging to any straw in the flood tide of her destruction, stretched out an arm to Lorenzo, and called upon him to save her.

And Lorenzo taking my Lady Beatrice aside, would ask her, "What shall I write, how shall I answer them?"

Now, my Lord had posed to receive his guest at the hour of noon upon this February day, and when Beatrice did not come, and he must change his position frequently, even take a pen in his hand and scribble idle words upon the paper, or strike a new attitude, or rearrange the folds of the great purple cloak spread out upon the bench beside him, his temper, rarely childlike, became at length in-

tolerable, and he rated the lacqueys, and sent out the messengers, and threatened this fellow, and threatened that, until none but his personal servant Noello remained for the service of the chamber; and even he was sneaking away from such an ill-mannered outbreak, when what should happen, but that a lacquey opened the door of the *salon* without warning, and there stood the Marquise, and there my Lord in as woeful a disorder as ever she had discovered him. White with passion, his purple cloak trodden under foot, his hair awry—he could but stand and gaze at her as at some child who had surprised him in naughtiness—while she on her part clapped her hands delightedly and begged him to continue with it.

“My Lord,” she cried, “here is Settecervelli with his cloak upon the stones—where then is his dog? I beg you continue—oh, my Lord, it must be well with us since our leaders dance.”

Noello, the valet, picked up the fallen cloak, and Lorenzo, conducting the Marquise to her chair near his table, made such apology as he could—and in the matter of apology, as a wit has said, few were better than he.

“Marquise,” he said, “set your foot upon the cloak and it shall lie upon my heart. It is true that I was angry. Well, since it is upon your account, why not? If there be any proper cause of anger, and I could name many, surely a woman is the first to be thought of. Your letter said noon—it is now one o’clock. Judge if I have not a reason.”

“The best, my Lord, and yet the worst, for if

reason be a woman then is folly at her heels. I received your letter and I came—when I had the mind to. Say that I distress you and I will return again. If Lorenzo has such a mind for Carnival that he must play Settevercelli at the Palazzo Burano, why, then, I at least may remind him that my gondola is still at the *riva*.

He silenced her with a torrent of protest, gathering up his papers and books, and recovering what he could of his fallen dignity. My lady herself, radiant in youth and laughter, watched him from the depths of her round black eyes, and said that of all the empty heads in Venice, this empty head amused her the most. But she was very curious, none the less, to know why he had summoned her to the palace.

"The police say that Joseph Villetard has crossed from Maestre this morning," she began ; "the news and your letter came by the same messenger. Shall I add one to the other, my Lord, and say that I am here because of them? Or shall we speak of the Signorina Rizzi and the players at San Luca—oh, there's a profitable thing now, and French, my Lord ; as French as I am, who was a little while in that happy country. Yes, it shall be the players at San Luca."

My lord raised his hands in dumb protest, although his eyes blinked queerly when she spoke of the Signorina Rizzi. Her quick perception in naming the purpose of his message offended him, for he wished it to be a great surprise to her ; and he was annoyed that a woman should be early

informed of such grave matters. It had been his hope to spring a tragic surprise upon her with many a dark hint and fearsome gesture ; but here she was full of the affair, and so little put out by it that she could remember the players at the San Luca Theatre.

"Marquise," he retorted, while he fetched a deep sigh, which he meant for a reproach upon her flippancy, "if you speak of the players to-day, you will find a dull audience. I sent for you, yes, because Villetard is here. You know Paris and you know the man. We shall rely upon you to tell us all you know, that we may act as becomes those who are the guardians of a people's honour, I may say of their very existence. This paper before me, it must go to the Serene Prince within the hour. You see that my need is great—and yet you delay?"

My lady leaned back upon her couch, and perceiving her own fair figure looking out at her from one of the many mirrors which decorated that splendid apartment, she delighted herself with an instant's appreciation of it before she answered my lord.

"Why not?" she exclaimed presently ; "why not delay, Lorenzo ? Since nothing will be done, is not soon as good as late for the doing it ? I have been in Paris, true, and I know Villetard. Shall I tell you that he is clever ? What does it profit ? Would such a man as Bonaparte have sent him here if he were a fool ? Shall I say that he is shrewd ? You will learn as much for yourselves before to-morrow is

old. Oh, no, I am too French to speak of it—go elsewhere, my Lord, while you have the time; go to San Luca and acclaim Goldoni, who would have taught you had you the ears to listen.”

She laughed a short, silvery laugh and watched my lord indolently while he wrote something upon the paper in a fine flourishing hand worthy of the writer. He cared nothing for her cynical address—his one aim was to let the Savi understand that he knew all about Villetard and could advise them wisely. And to this end she had already given him a clue, for had she not said that nothing would be done. He made a note of it—nothing would be done, and Villetard was dangerous.

“My dear lady,” he said, “no one is better able to speak of it in all Venice. This man is shrewd and clever, you say, and he comes as General Bonaparte’s own ambassador. Well, what then? Are we ignorant why he comes, we who have suffered this French adventurer’s exactions, who have bled for him and died for his caprice? Are we to bow the head because yet another schemer comes among us and brings new demands? If the Savi listen to me, they will make short work of Joseph Villetard, believe me. I would pack him out of Venice neck and crop, and with him every French rogue who works a mischief among us. Therein lies safety—but you know how it will be. We shall temporise, bandy words, fill our drawers with documents—and Villetard will remain, the fox in the hen-roost—the wolf in the fold, to be petted and made much of because Napoleon has sent him.

So much I foresaw when the news was brought to me. It is the beginning of the end, I said ; Venice has gone mad and in madness she will perish."

He spoke now with something of a fanatic's temper and earnestness, and my lady watched him with pity, for the truth of it was not to be gainsayed. And yet their ways of wisdom were as far asunder as the poles, and while he would have found salvation in enmity to France, she believed that by friendship alone would the city be saved.

"If Villetard goes, another will take his place," she said a little sadly. "Write that in letters of gold and read it to the Senate, Lorenzo. Five years ago opportunity came to you in white raiment—but you flung her gifts aside, and she will never return. I tell you the same story every day—when one man is to be found in all this city, then may Venice hope. For what are you doing to save her—where is your cleverness? You defy Bonaparte with wands in your hands ; you cry Heaven to witness your wrongs and avenge them with pamphlets ; you crave delay when Terra Firma is wet with woman's tears and the sky is dark with the smoke of burning houses. Five years ago you would have done all. This man offered you alliance, honourable and to your profit. You rejected it with evil words and eternal promises. You sought no alliance, you said ; Venice must stand alone. Oh, brave independence, written upon parchment and defended by courtesans. And now, when it is too late, when all is wagered and lost, you answer Bonaparte by insulting his ambassador. I worship your wisdom and bow to it, my Lord. As

an honourable company of assassins, you surely have no equal in Europe."

My Lord did not like this new turn, and finding that she had ceased to inspire him, he rose from his chair and began to pace the long room, pausing at last before a silver candlestick in which five tapers were burning, despite the sunny morning and the brightness of the day. These tapers Lorenzo touched with gentle fingers, petting and fondling them as a man might fondle a spirited child.

"I know nothing of assassination," he rejoined with some asperity; "that is for the people, my Lady, who have yet to learn the Corsican's title. They suffer, they retaliate; who will blame them if they do so?"

He went on fingering the candles with a caressing touch, and presently he said—

"They tell me that Chateaudun is dead. I am sorry for it. Now, if it had been Joyeuse——"

"You said, my Lord——"

"That if it had been Joyeuse, my candlestick would burn a taper the less to-day."

There was something so pleasing in this idea that Lorenzo continued for many minutes to fondle his beloved candles (which his enemies said were but one more evidence of his dotage), and presently, blowing very softly upon one of them, but not to extinguish it, he went on—

"But Joyeuse must go. That is quite decided. He is too active for us, Marquis."

"You would say, my Lord, that he is too zealous in protecting the lives of his fellow-countrymen."

"As you please—his view is something like that, no doubt. I mean that he is a dangerous enemy and as such must be removed."

"From Venice, Lorenzo?"

"From Venice, my child."

"I am told that it is a long journey—sometimes, Lorenzo."

"But never tedious, Marquise. Well, the Count has no one to blame. He has been warned. A month ago the Serene Prince cautioned him that the French invaders must leave Venice. His answer is to summon this man, this sphinx Villetard. They quarter their ruffians upon us as though our palaces were barracks and our piazza their drill-ground. Can they blame reprisal? No, Joyeuse must go. It will be a lesson to Bonaparte."

"They tell me that the Corsican is dull at his books, Lorenzo."

"So far, but we shall quicken him. When he understands that the friendship of Venice is to be had at a price——"

"At your price, Lorenzo?"

"It may be; but at a price which the Signori will approve. I am merely the instrument of a wise decision. What I am going to put down upon that paper to-day is the final expression of a great resolution. There must not be one Frenchman left in Venice in ten days' time. You must help me with that, Marquise; we must surpass ourselves; appeal, entreaty, irony, wit—we must employ them all. The French must go; Joyeuse must die."

"Must die, my Lord?"

"Ah, my tongue is foolish. I should say that he must leave us. If he will not——"

"In that case?"

"Oh, I shall blow out a taper."

Beatrice, who had not taken her eyes from my Lord's face while she questioned him, did not betray herself by so much as a word or movement; but the effort cost her much, and there was a note of hardness in her voice when next she spoke.

"Do you know the Count, my Lord?"

"I have met him at the Palazzo Grimani."

"They tell me that he is a man of many accomplishments, and much beloved by Bonaparte. Have you heard anything of that?"

"There is some talk of it; my opportunities were brief; I cannot be expected to interest myself in accomplishments, Marquise."

"Indeed, you cannot, Lorenzo. Superficially, then, the Count does not interest you."

"He interests me so much that when I meet him at your house——"

"At my house, Lorenzo?"

"At your house, one week from to-day—I give him a week, Marquise—I will applaud him for an Admirable Crichton whom Paris cannot match. Come, fall in with that and tell me it is clever. If there is one house in Venice to which a stranger goes with an easy conscience, it is to that of the Marquise de St. Remy. You do not know him, but you have only to lift a finger and he will obey. Procure an introduction this very day; you can do it without remark, for the Inquisitors will know and

understand. I shall lay my idea before them this morning with the appeal to patriots. Meanwhile, justice demands that Joyeuse be warned. I will see that it is done. Let him leave Venice while he may go in peace."

"You are generous, Lorenzo. A noble heart beats beneath that purple robe. I do not wonder that the people love you. And all for my poor country, too."

My Lord lifted his saintly eyes to heaven and protested that it was, indeed, for the sake of Venice and the children of Venice (a phrase he had uttered many times in the market-place) that he so effaced himself; and believing that he had won her wholly, he took up a pen and prepared to write.

"We must begin the address—I deliver it to-night," he said.

"You are assured of my help, then?"

"I have not the least doubt of it."

"We are to tell the people that their safety lies in the banishment of every Frenchman from Venice."

"I hold it vital. We must let Bonaparte know that our patience is exhausted."

"And threaten him with sugarsticks from Florian's. Valiant nation. Well, I am ready, Lorenzo—write on."

He knew my lady's habit of satire, and bore with her when she stood a little while at the window of the room and watched the busy canal below, the darting gondolas and all the garish colour in which Venice mourned her departing liberties. Beatrice would help him presently—there was no tongue

more eloquent in all Italy ; and when she began to speak in a sweet lingering voice, my lord cared for nothing but that he should catch every word of that golden logic. "How they will applaud this," he kept saying to himself—"what wit, what fervour, what pathos!" He could hear himself already declaiming the rolling phrases, and he licked his lips as though mouthing a masterpiece. Half an hour passed before my lady finished, and when she did so, he crossed the room and kissed her hands with rapture.

"You have the eloquence of Demosthenes and the grace of Venus, Marquise," he said. "How can I repay you—impossible. I will write my gratitude in diamonds and hang it about your neck." She pushed him away and gathered her cloak about her shoulders.

"You weary me," she said with a sudden change of mood which astounded him ; "some day you will not be so grateful, Lorenzo."

He followed her to the gondola, protesting that though not one stone of Venice remained upon another, he would still find some temple wherein he might worship her—but when she had left him and he returned to gather up his papers, he said to himself :

"A little while yet and I shall have no need of you, Marquise."

And Beatrice alone at last with her great fear, said in her turn :

"Your address to patriots is your death warrant, my lord."

CHAPTER III

A DOUBLE DOOR OF BRONZE

JOSEPH VILLETARD, unlike the majority of his fellow-countrymen, was not an early riser, for he had acquired the habit of reading and working in the silent hours of the night, and the dawn usually found him heavy in sleep. This habit his visit to Venice did not interrupt ; and when his new servant Zannuchio, the Dalmatian, entered his room at six o'clock upon the morning following his arrival, he discovered his master in so deep a slumber that words would not wake him, and a touch of the hand upon his shoulder merely elicited a dismal groan. When the emissary at last opened his eyes, he stared about him for some while as though quite lost to the sense of time or place or the identity of the intruder, and his morning greeting was far from civil.

"Who the devil are you ?" he asked curtly.

"Your servant Zannuchio, Excellency—engaged yesterday."

"Yesterday, yesterday—and why yesterday——"

"As good a day as any other, Excellency—better

than to-morrow, for instance. I am here to tell you that it is six o'clock, and that your friend has gone to church."

Villetard laughed that such an accusation should be brought against any friend of his, and when he had rubbed his eyes and grumbled sufficiently, he looked again at the somewhat terrifying figure of his servant, and began to recollect the circumstances under which he had engaged him.

"Yes, I remember now," he conceded; "you are the Dalmatian rogue my friend Bernardi recommends to me. Is not that so?"

Zannuchio bowed with stately acquiescence.

"I am that person, my Lord."

"And you have done what I told you to do?"

"Everything—my friends are now your friends, Excellency, for the trifling payment of ten ducats a week. Suffer no anxieties—I, Zannuchio, have ordered it."

"Wonderful man! Did you wake me up to tell me that?"

"I intruded on your Excellency's leisure for the purpose of telling you that my lord Count had gone to church. When your Excellency reflects upon it, you will remember——"

"Yes, that I commanded you to do so. Let me have hot water at once. I am going to follow the Count, Zannuchio."

"I imagined that your Excellency would desire to imitate so worthy a young man. There is but one thing more, my Lord."

"And that?"

"The honourable tailor, who craves leave to inspect your Excellency's body."

Villetard sprang from his bed, and began to dress himself hastily. A friend had recommended this fantastic creature, half Italian, half Slav, for his servant; and he had taken him upon the principle that a thief is best set to catch a thief. Zannuchio's pompous phrases, learned upon his knees at Eastern courts, amused the Emissary, and he was assured that a trifling sum expended among the bravos in this man's employ, was a better passport to security than any document with which the Inquisitors might furnish him. The Dalmatian, indeed, knew every face and figure of note in the city, and the mere fact of his engagement as courier by a traveller, assured that traveller's safety. None the less, his presence was not a little embarrassing, and conducive to a renown, sometimes undesirable; for he was garbed like a Greek, and his flowing robes were multi-coloured as Joseph's coat—moreover, his loquacity was unenviable, and scarcely to be suffered by a man of silent habits. This Villetard discovered when he quitted the "White Lion," and being come to the piazzetta, set out to walk to the cathedral to find Gaston. Zannuchio would have given him the history of every pillar—as false as it was clever—if he would have suffered it.

"Yonder, my Lord," he began, "yonder are the two columns——"

But Villetard silenced him upon the instant.

"Their names are 'Prudence' and 'Speak-when-you-are-spoken-to,' friend Zannuchio. Have the goodness to remember it."

The old man lifted his hands in an attitude of reproachful amazement. What, he said to himself, a stranger who did not care for the columns of St. Mark! Such a surly rogue, surely, had never been known in Venice.

"But, Excellency——"

"No buts, Zannuchio—silence until I speak. The Count, you say, is in the Cathedral?"

"Taken there neither by 'Prudence' nor by 'Speak-when-you-are-spoken-to,' Excellency. Yes, he is in the Cathedral which was formerly the chapel of the Ducal Palace. And if I may be permitted to point out to your Excellency that the spot upon which we are standing——"

"Oh, go to the devil, old man."

"I follow your Excellency."

Villetard laughed at the thrust and sauntered on leisurely under the arcade of the piazza. There was no sun yet, and lights still twinkled in the houses of the great square, while the cloaked figures of men and women moved briskly in the raw air, some towards the shuttered shops, others towards the open doors of St. Mark's, which invited the worshippers. At this hour of the day no sign was to be read of Venice's unrest or of that apprehension which coloured every act of her citizens in their leisure moments; bells did not ring out less musically because the French had crossed the mountains, the fishwives were not less numerous, the cries of the fishwives less raucous because of the Senate's incapacity or the Inquisitor's impotence. The city awoke to her common affairs,

briskly as though no political debauch of yesterday night had wearied her, and she did not stand upon the threshold of her doom. Villetard, indeed, passed almost unobserved to the very narthex of the great church, and even in such a place, few remarked that he was a Frenchman or penetrated the disguise which a newly purchased cloak had won for him. The object of each was worship—or a rendezvous; and Villetard told himself that this was a strange people, which made love in a Church before the sun was up. Then he went and stood by one of the pillars of the nave and listened to the monotonous chanting of the priests who were singing the morning office. The darkness everywhere was almost that of night; a few tapers burned upon the side altars where Mass was being said; but elsewhere nothing relieved the heavy gloom, and it was impossible to distinguish one face from another. Villetard delighted in the protection which this darkness afforded him, and, becoming bolder, he entered the chapel upon the left hand of the high altar, and there perceived his friend the Count.

Gaston knelt before a *prie-dieu*, apparently absorbed in his devotions; and quite near to him, so near that he could have stretched out a hand and touched her, was Beatrice, Marquise de St. Remy. Observed in the mellow light, which a branch of tapers, burning before an image, cast upon the figures, even Villetard the Emissary could admit that they justified the Venetian practice and said much for it. The Marquise herself added to her

youth a certain vague air of dignity and self-possession rarely seen in one so young. Had she sat for one of Bellini's Madonnas, or to Titian for his Ariadne, the masters might have searched afar and found no model more typical of these faces they loved to paint. For her charm was of a pensive beauty which a question could awake to splendid vitality, and the dreamy eyes, drooping now beneath heavy lids, could, in an instant, so assent, affirm, or contradict, that she had little need of her silvery tongue, and better conversed thus.

Very fair, with an abundance of dark chestnut-coloured hair, her features were sufficiently classical to give her grace, but pre-eminently feminine, so that they justified the critics in all their fabulous stories of her intrigues and their consequences. When Villetard first saw her, a heavy mantilla almost in the Spanish fashion covered her shoulders and hid the shapely hands from observation. She appeared, indeed, to see nothing but the frescoes above the altar and the figures of the Saints which looked down upon her; but just when the priest said "Peace be with you" the round black eyes opened widely and a flash, wherein was written every message which a woman can utter, passed to the young Count at her side. Villetard felt it like a ray of warm sunshine striking even him in that gloomy chapel. And he said again—"There certainly is a woman."

Henceforth it was for him an enchanting comedy. Each time that the priest said "*Pax vobiscum*" the black eyes flashed and the stately head was turned—



A rose upon the pavement

[Page 10.]

but so rapidly with such apparent unconsciousness that any casual observer would have remained entirely ignorant both of the play and the players. Villetard, however, missed no detail of it—his friend Gaston's prayers must be sad stuff to-day, he thought, and he numbered those trifling episodes, the message of the eyes, the deep sighs, the restless play of the hands upon the book, and the hands beneath the mantilla. These two were lovers, he said, excellent actors, both worthy of Molière's house. How beautifully the girl timed her favours—but four in all during the Mass; and when it was done, she rose from her knees and went straight out through the great doors as though Gaston the Hussar did not exist for her. But she did not deceive Joseph Villetard: nothing was to be hidden from him—the abrupt parting, the Count's swift stoop, as that of a falcon upon quarry—he could have described it all exactly a month after it had happened.

"Ha, ha!" said Villetard, "a rose upon the pavement; well, we shall have a veritable Jardin des Plantes by and by."

He allowed Gaston to leave the church, and then, following leisurely, he beckoned the aged Zannuchio to him and began to question him.

"Who is that woman, Zannuchio?"

"A very great person indeed in Venice, Excellency—no less than the sister of the Lord Zorzi."

"Her name?"

"They call her the Marquise de St. Remy. She lives in the old Casa degli Spiriti quite near to

the Church of San Zaccaria. It dates, your Excellency, from the reign of the Serene——"

"For the love of Heaven get on! Who is the woman, and where is her husband?"

"I have told your Excellency that she is my Lady Beatrice, sister to the Lord Zorzi. As to her husband—well, he is dead, and how shall I know where he is?"

"She was married to a Frenchman, then?"

"To no other than the Marquis de St. Remy, ambassador from his Majesty of France to our late Serene Prince, Paolo Renier, who has a brass by Sansovino upon the knocker of his house, Excellency."

Zannuchio was very pleased to have relieved his feelings in this way, and he nodded affably and repeated the words, "upon the knocker of his house," as though they lingered pleasantly upon his palate; but Villetard remained for a little while plunged in deep thought while he endeavoured to recall the circumstances of the Embassy and the story of the Ambassador.

"St. Remy, St. Remy—ah, they did for him at Lyons in the year '92. At what age do you say the girl was married, old man?"

"She was married in her sixteenth year, and lived two short years with her husband in France. She should now be twenty-three, your Excellency; but one never knows with women."

"True enough, my Socrates. Woman is as young as her power for mischief, and when that passes she is old. Is she rich, this Venus?"

"So rich that the least of the treasures of her house would furnish me with white wine of Cyprus for the rest of my days, Excellency. The Marquis did not buy Beatrice Zorzi for nothing—and then, she has inherited her uncle's fortune, you must know. There are pictures in her house by all the masters, even of the great Francesca Guardi, whom Titian has painted in the year——"

"Yes, yes, valuable pictures and other treasures—I understand. And her politics, Zannuchio? Does she love my countrymen?"

"So little that, whenever a throat is nailed to a church door, they say 'That man supped last night at the Casa degli Spiriti.' Observe how little gratitude women possess, your Excellency. Your Republic cuts off the head of a husband thirty years too old for her, and she thanks you by flinging the bodies of your countrymen into the canal before her windows. There's a pretty kind of tame dove for you."

"We shall teach her a lesson, Zannuchio, and soon. Call me a gondola—I wish to go to the Casa degli Spiriti. Did you not say that was the name of her house?"

"The old Casa—there are two of that name in the city. But your honourable Excellency would not think of going within. Even I could not protect you there."

"Have no fear. My throat is too precious, and I dislike water, Zannuchio. Bid this fellow go straight to the house. I am curious to see it."

A gondola, hooded with the *felze*, came swiftly

up to the steps, and they entered together and were rapidly carried away from the Piazzetta toward the public garden and the church of San Zaccaria. The gloom of the morning had passed by this time and a warm sun shone down upon the lapping blue waters of the lagoon and the picturesque brown sails which dotted it. Venice presented her most entrancing aspect, and as all things were new to Villetard, the silence of the city, the busy waterways, the rare music of voices and bells, and that indefinable sensation of interest and exhilaration which such a scene can awaken, he was too content for a little while to lie back upon the cushions of the gondola and to enjoy the present without any reference to the future. All Europe surely could show him nothing like this—those ramparts of marble and glittering domes and great lateen sails, and the black gondolas darting hither, thither, like small fry pursued by some monster fish. And then the azure blue of the unclouded sky and the life-giving breeze blowing in so freshly from Lido and the warm sunshine upon that which should have been a winter's day. Venice, he said, justified her reputation, and he remembered in the same breath that the hour of her glory was passed and that the iron hand of his master Bonaparte was already closing about her expiring energies.

They turned off from the open lagoon by the Riva degli Schiavoni, and so to the beautiful church of San Zaccaria upon which the eloquent Dalmatian had begun to be reminiscent when Villetard interrupted him a little brutally by asking—

"Whose gondola is that at the steps of the house, Zannuchio?"

The old man craned his neck that he might answer the question truly, but before he could speak his patron anticipated him and saved him the trouble of replying.

"Surely it is the woman herself and that is her house, old man?"

Zannuchio nodded his head as who should say, "This is my business, please leave it to me"; but he admitted at length that Villetard was correct.

"As you say, Excellency, that is the gondola of the Lady Beatrice, and yonder is the Casa degli Spiriti, where you may wish to remark the exceedingly handsome pergola in the Gothic style."

"I wish to remark nothing of the kind, ancient. If you would do me a service draw in that ugly head of yours lest my lady take alarm. Let me see—the second house from the second bridge and a double door of bronze."

"Which Sansovino cast, your Excellency——"

"And a double door of bronze. Thank you—that is quite sufficient. Now show me Venice—you understand—show me the city, fellow, and the best place for a good dinner. Is that to your liking?"

The old man uttered a loud cry of gratified license, and turned the gondola instantly towards Rialto and the palaces. Henceforth he talked like a book, but Joseph Villetard did not hear a word of

it. In plain truth, the emissary saw little either upon land or water, for he was telling himself all the time that he must remember a house with a double door of bronze and an exceedingly pretty woman, its mistress. When, towards two o'clock of the day, he returned to the "White Lion," his first question was for Gaston, his friend, but they told him that the hussar had not yet come back to the inn, and the same reply was made upon his repeating the inquiry at a later hour. So the day passed in some curiosity, and when the night fell and Gaston was still absent, Villetard became really anxious.

"There certainly is a woman," he said—and added, as the poorest possible consolation—"a woman who nails the throats of my countrymen to the doors of the Frari."

CHAPTER IV

AT THE CASA DEGLI SPIRITI

NOW that which had befallen Gaston, Count of Joyeuse, was this—that he had spent the morning in such work for his fellow-countrymen as Bonaparte had sent him to Venice to do; and thereafter, having breakfasted at Florian's, he was about to return to his gondola and his inn, when a young girl, dressed like any other girl of St. Mark's (of whom there were scores about the *café*), brushed lightly by his table, and, shooting a meaning glance from mischievous eyes, she permitted a single white rose to drop upon his plate, and then ran on, laughing loudly at her own cleverness. Gaston, who had now been three months in Venice, was too well schooled in the common code of amours to mistake either the meaning of the glance or the act which accompanied it, and feigning an indifference he was far from feeling, he covered the rose with his napkin and so conveyed it stealthily to the shelter of his cape. Having paid his bill, he now sauntered off as though for a ramble through the

Merceria ; but turning abruptly into a narrow lane by the Palace of the Patriarchs, he first made sure that he was neither watched nor followed, and then drew the flower from his breast and examined it more carefully. That some letter or message was concealed amid its leaves he did not doubt ; and when he had torn the petals from the stalk, a tiny roll of white paper rewarded him, and he read these words :—

“To-night, at six o’clock, upon the Riva degli Schiavoni a friend would speak with you.”

Gaston tore the scrap of paper into the smallest of pieces and then sauntered on again, but so deep in thought that those he elbowed cursed him for a careless Frenchman, and even the girls at the doors of the shops found their eloquence and their flattery quite vain. Knowing what he did of the precarious favour in which the French were then held by the Venetians, and of the dangers which compassed them about in the streets and upon the waters of the city, this message appealed first to his instinct of prudence, and he determined to be trapped by no such transparent artifice—but this reflection was a mere tribute to his own sagacity, and it gave place speedily to a train of reasoning more in accord with his own desires.

And this was the argument.

“I am a soldier and I have known many women. This message undoubtedly comes from the Marquise, for the white rose is her emblem. I would trust my own life to her with the surest conviction of her fidelity. One has only to look into her eyes to read

her character and disposition. She must know that I should have made it my business to be presented to her upon the first opportunity—therefore, she has some good reason to anticipate our meeting. I can imagine none sufficient unless it be something which concerns me very closely—my fortune, perhaps my life. It is true that she is said to be no lover of the French, but that which is said in Venice is so often untrue that I shall believe it when I know it. After all, the Marquise is greatly in the confidence of certain men who might be useful to us—that old rogue Lorenzo for one of them. She may think it more prudent that we should remain strangers here ; and if she has anything to tell me which will be useful to the General, it is plainly my duty to go."

He added nothing of his own inclinations. When a man very much wishes to meet a woman and is quite aware that such a rendezvous is imprudent, he rarely suggests that inclination is the spur and desire the argument. So it was with friend Gaston—and from the moment he surrendered his volition and determined to go to the Riva degli Schiavoni, he abandoned himself wholly to the plea of benefit, while in his heart he knew that Venice could reward him with no hour more ecstatic than that which would bring him face to face with Beatrice, Marquise de St. Remy, in her own house by the church of San Zaccaria.

It was wholly a pleasant argument, and Gaston whiled away the long day chiefly in the contrivance of an excuse which should satisfy the curiosity of

the prying Villetard. Determined that his purpose should not be thwarted, he was careful to avoid the White Lion Inn for the rest of the afternoon, and, having breakfasted at an obscure coffee-house and visited certain friends who had the latest news of the French colony and its welfare, he embarked in his gondola at a quarter to six, and was upon the Riva degli Schiavoni precisely five minutes later. Night had come down by this time, and lights were shining out upon the broad waters of the lagoon. An unclouded sky gave promise of a clear moon later on, and so big and bright were the stars in the heavens that some of them appeared to hang like lamps of the purest gold above the domes of the churches, there to keep watch upon the sacred mysteries. Gaston loved Venice, and every stone in that city of the treasures had become dear to him ; but this bewitching hour of soft grey lights and hazy shadows and fantastic buildings shaped so oddly against the radiant zenith cast upon him a spell of enchantment which he never could resist. Above all else was Venice a haven of mysteries, he said ; and every cloaked figure that passed by, the music of a voice upon the waters, the lingering harmonies floating away on the lapping tide could retell some story of her romance, perchance of her tragedies. But for himself they should tell a story of my Lady Beatrice, whose voice he would hear for the first time to-night and whose hand he would touch.

Gaston's heart beat quickly when he repeated this. Yes, whatever befell afterwards he would see my lady to-night.



The rendezvous of the white rose

There were many citizens upon the busy Riva degli Schiavoni; lumbering porters worked by torchlight and dragged bales from the crowded ships; sailors of many nationalities loitered in noisy argument or quarrelled in drunken good-humour; hussies from the coffee-shops coquetted at the verandas or kept a court among the steps of bridges—but not among these did Gaston find his messenger. A quarter of an hour passed, and he began to wonder if it were but a hoax after all—or might it be something of greater moment than the jest, the first-fruit of that folly which had brought him to the quay on an errand so quixotical? Here was a suggestion to send him with wary steps and with a hand upon his sword. He was a man of iron courage, but the lurking danger of the shadows affrighted him because he knew that courage would serve him not at all against it. So many of his friends had set out upon such an errand as this and the dawn had found their bodies floating on the tide of death or nailed by the throat to the doors of those houses whereto dark eyes had beckoned them. And what right had he to believe in the good faith of any woman? Absolutely none, he said, and, saying it, he looked up and perceived the messenger.

A gondola had come up to the steps of the Riva while he walked, and a torch being held aloft for an instant and then as quickly extinguished, Gaston beheld the laughing face of the flower-girl who had cast a rose upon his breakfast-table at noon that day. He was astonished to discover how all his fine

figures of fear and argument vanished before this dainty vignette which the flare permitted to him, and he had no hesitation whatever in going down to the water's edge and entering the gondola. The girl herself was still laughing when she made a place for him beside her, and he could see her black eyes shining and feel the touch of her soft flesh even in the darkness of the cabin. So without a word changed between them they put out into the lagoon, and there, making a wide *détour*, almost as though their destination were the island of the Giudecca, the boatman cried *preme* anon, and with a dexterous sweep of his oar he brought the gondola round and set her prow for the bridge of the church of San Zaccaria. Then, for the first time, Gaston addressed his merry companion.

"Signorina," he said, "your jest goes in a circle, then."

"To its profit, Signore, since there shall be no end to it."

"But at least I must hear the message——"

"Oh, Signor, the white rose is the message."

"In a language unfamiliar to me, Signorina. Admit, however, that I accept the emblem, since I am here at your disposition. If we are to begin and end with a torn petal, yonder Riva is as good a hunting ground as any other. You will not forget that you carry a hungry man."

"Men never permit us to forget that, Signore."

"One, nevertheless, who has great faith in the virtues of your hospitality."

"I am sure of it, or I would not say to him, there is the house where the roses grow, Signore."

Her laugh was a little triumphant and yet struck a note which Gaston did not find it altogether pleasant to hear—for there was an after-echo as of half-uttered words which applauded her own victory. He did not heed her, however, for he had already determined to carry the adventure to its end; and, besides, the gondola had already touched the steps of a house, and, when he looked up, the hussar perceived double doors of bronze, and beyond them, for they stood half open, a well-lighted marble hall, and a crimson carpet upon a marble staircase. To say that he was in any doubt as to the name of this house or its mistress would have been to charge him with an ignorance of Venice which would have been childish. This was the Casa degli Spiriti, he said, and yonder, in one of the rooms above that great staircase, its mistress, Beatrice, Marquise de St. Remy, awaited him. Gaston would have been less than human if his heart had not been stirred by the favour of one who was then accounted the most beautiful and the most influential women in the city. In truth, he was scarcely master of himself when he stepped from the gondola, and he had no words for the lacquey who received him and closed the bronze doors behind him. That it should end in this—that merry flirtation, those idle hours when the eyes spoke but the lips were silent. He would not ask whither such a road was leading him—he believed that he had won

a woman's love and he knew that he would shield her honour with his life.

Now, there were two lacqueys in the hall to receive him, and a third upon the staircase to usher him into my lady's *salon*. Gaston had imagined that he would be received in the great apartment upon the first floor as is the common custom in Venice; but herein he was mistaken, for the servant turned to the left at the stairhead (an unlucky omen), and going some way down an empty corridor, he opened a heavy door at the end of it, and beyond that, the second door of an antechamber, leading to one of the brightest and most perfect little nests the hussar had ever seen. Everything was French here except the exquisite chandeliers of many-coloured glass and the goblets upon the buffet, which were the work of Beroviero, and many of them priceless. Gaston might almost have believed himself in one of the smaller rooms at Versailles or Fontainebleau so closely was the French fashion followed, while the perfect art of every detail, the rich frescoes of the ceiling and the delicate silken panels upon the walls spoke eloquently of a discreet taste and ample means to gratify it. Here, as in the hall below, a multitude of pure wax candles cast a mellow light upon the treasures of the house, and so thick was the carpet, so heavy the curtains that no footfall was to be heard, and scarce a sound from the city without. Gaston said that so far he would have been hard to please if his reception had disappointed him; and then he looked at the dainty white cloth upon the

table, and he remarked a strange thing. But one place was laid there ; no provision at all had been made for guests ; and, not a little astonished, he turned to the servant and asked him a question.

"Your mistress expects me ?" he said.

The young man who answered him had a striking face, gentle and not a little attractive ; and his dress and manner were not those of a common lacquey, nor was his tone subservient when he replied—

"Your Excellency is expected. Do you wish me to serve supper ?"

"My good fellow, I did not come here to sup, as you may imagine. Please to tell Madame la Marquise that I am here, obedient to her order and awaiting her pleasure."

The young man crossed the room and drew the curtain a little closer when he answered—

"I will tell her, Excellency. Nevertheless, supper is prepared, and if you—but your Excellency will be pleased to ring."

The accompanying gesture indicated a silken bell-pull upon the right-hand side of the chimney-piece ; and having done as much and set a chair straight, and snuffed a candle, the youth went to the door of the room, then repeated—

"Your Excellency will consider yourself master here."

"With the greatest possible goodwill——"

"And command us according to your pleasures ?"

"I have already done so. Let your mistress know that I am come."

The young man bowed and left the room ; and

Gaston, excited not a little by the manner of his reception, but convinced, nevertheless, that he was about to meet my Lady Beatrice face to face, fell to pacing the little room with uneasy step—which diversion he varied upon occasion by a critical inspection of himself in one of the many mirrors which the apartment displayed. Such a concession to his vanity by no means displeased him, for he beheld there where many a girl of Venice remembered and many a woman had studied closely—though rarely to the satisfaction either of girl or woman, since Gaston's devotion to his duty and passionate belief in his master, the General Napoleon, were far too real to admit of such vanity. Then in his thirty-first year, the long oval face was still very youthful, while the silky fair hair (for the army had abandoned the tie-wig since the Revolution), with a black ribbon as a relic of a former habit, had something of the Northman's auburn abundance, and was not a little becoming to such a face. The eyes, however, were almost black, so catching my lady's—and here was no uncommon thing that some in the city had remarked, the resemblance these twain bore the one to the other, and maintained that they would pass for brother or sister should the occasion arise. Certainly an air of intellectual refinement was common to both, and if Gaston's mouth and lips seemed to contradict the promise of the open forehead and the clear-cut features and to speak of a latent sensuality, the whole cast of his countenance was distinctly pleasing and inviting to confidence. His dress, too (for he

invariably wore the uniform of his regiment of hussars) matched his fair skin excellently well, and the short cloak added to the breadth of an unusually fine pair of shoulders and showed his sturdy limbs which the hard school of campaigns had robbed of every ounce of superfluous flesh. In short, he was a man to win remark in any company; and being neither more nor less vain than other men, he was pleased with that which the glass showed him, and he turned away with some satisfaction to pace the room again and wonder what kept my lady. In this pursuit of an idea the half of an hour passed; and it becoming plain to him at last that an assignation for one was an exceedingly poor amusement, he rang the bell, and it was answered instantly by the civil young man.

"Well," said Gaston, a little impatiently, "did you inform your mistress?"

"Excellency, it was impossible to find her at the Burano Palace with

Gaston stood like one who saw that his assignment was not unmingled

"Your mistress is at home, Excellency, but she is not at home now. What in Heaven's name can she be doing for?"

The young man cast down his eyes demurely, following a pattern of the crimson carpet with his foot, he said:—

"My mistress will return, Excellency."

"A fine story. Has she been delayed there?"

"Undoubtedly—my Lord has much to speak of."

"And little to do, eh? Is that all you are com-

manded to tell me ? Come, you are keeping something back."

The young man advanced a step farther into the room, and, looking Gaston full in the face, he continued, "Madame la Marquise desires you to make this house your home, Excellency—at least until other arrangements can be made."

Gaston laughed outright now. If the young man had said, "Please carry away the Casa degli Spiriti, and keep it in remembrance of us," it would not have astonished him more. To take up his residence under an Italian roof, he, Gaston, a Frenchman, detested by every good patriot, the *attaché* of General Bonaparte—was ever so preposterous a suggestion made ? Nevertheless, he would not argue with a valet, so he merely said—

"Convey my compliments to Madame, and my regret that I cannot avail myself of her kindness. It would have been better had she been frank with me at the beginning. And be good enough to summon my gondola."

He snatched up his cloak and his sword while he spoke, and was about to leave the house, when the young man again interposed in a voice as gentle as before—

"Then your Excellency has not read the letter——"

Gaston paused, cloak upon his arm and sword-belt still unbuckled while he asked—

"Letter—what letter do you mean ?"

"The letter from Madame—there upon the table, Excellency."

He had not seen it, though it had been there all

the time, white upon the white cloth, a perfumed scented note with my lady's golden chalice for its crest, and the motto of the house, "*Foy en tout*," upon its fantastic scroll. Be sure that Gaston tore apart the seals with trembling fingers, and, smoothing out the paper, he read these words—

"There is no excuse but one, my Lord Count, for the pretext upon which you are brought to my house and the manner in which you will be received here. It is that of your own personal safety and of the honour of the city of my birth and of all my hopes. Since the hour for plain speaking has come, and nothing but plain speaking will save the lives of those who have trusted in the sacred promises of this Republic, I say to you that in no harbourage which Venice can offer you to-day, in no alley, however remote, neither upon the land nor upon the water, save in this house alone, are you safe from the vengeance of those who pursue and presently will destroy you. Rest here, I beg of you, my Lord, until this danger be passed by and a sure means be found to avert it in the future. And if your friends must know, trust in my servants as in your own, and let the message be sent to such as deserve it—remembering this, that the many invite a curiosity which few may brave with little risk either to themselves or to others. I pray you, Monsieur, destroy this letter when you shall have read it, and assuring you that the need of writing shall presently be no hazard to us, I crave permission to offer the assurance of my cordial esteem. — BEATRICE, MARQUISE DE ST. REMY."

Gaston's first action, when he had read this letter, was to fold it carefully and there and then thrust it into the flame of one of the candles upon the table. When it was quite consumed, and he had cast the ashes into the open grate, he remembered that he was not alone, and, looking up, he perceived the young man's eyes fixed upon him, but with such an air of gentle approval and abashed solicitude that his acquaintance with the contents of the letter was self-evident, and Gaston questioned him immediately.

"What is your name, young man?"

"I am known as Galla, your Excellency, Giovanni Galla."

"You have been long the servant of Madame la Marquise?"

"Since her childhood, Monsieur. I was with her in France."

"A trusted servant, I am sure!"

"Excellency, I seek to merit trust."

"And find it. I see that you are pleased with me, friend Giovanni. Is not that so?"

"It is not for me to be pleased, Monsieur. But, if you will forgive me for saying so, your Excellency is very wise."

"You mean in that I have burned your mistress's letter?"

"Yes, Excellency. There are few letters so precious that their loss may not be our gain."

"A diplomatist, truly. I will ask you another question. If you were in my place, what would you do, Giovanni?"

"Excellency, I should command supper."

"Most excellently said. Let it be served at once. Your supper, Giovanni—and then my gondola. Is that your wisdom?"

"No, Excellency; I would sup and leave the rest. We can only do one thing well at a time."

Gaston liked his humour, and, dismissing him upon it, he sat at the table and was instantly served with a supper worthy of the Casa degli Spiriti and its reputation in the city. An excellent vegetable soup preceded a dish of red mullet, and after that came lampreys from Binasco, then wild fowl from the Dogado, the renowned veal of Chioggia, poultry from the Polesine of Rovigo, quails from Lombardy, and the famous cheese of Piaceriza. The wine was both red and white, the former of Capri and the latter from the Hungarian vintages then so popular in Venice. The season of the year being unfavourable for fruit, a pretty basket of grapes, all moulded in sugar, with an *épergne*, similarly contrived, to carry oranges, were offered for dessert, and accompanied by a flask of Maraschino from Zara, and that which Gaston had seen once or twice in Venice already—little rolls of tobacco covered over with paper and brought from the East as curiosities. Both these and the sweets, however, he dismissed abruptly; and rose-water having been served in a great silver dish, he addressed one of the lacqueys and commanded his gondola—upon which the two men left the room noiselessly and closed the door after them.

It must be said here that Gaston had not the

remotest intention of remaining at the Casa degli Spiriti. So far as it would have brought about acquaintance with the mistress of the house and perpetuated that flirtation begun happily in the cathedral, he liked it well enough; but he was too sure a servant of his duty to be turned from it for a moment either by the Marquise's fears or her stratagem. Her warning was a friendly act for which he would thank her when he had the opportunity: none of the dangers of the waters of Venice were unknown to him—so many of his friends had been the dead witnesses of the truth; but for such dangers he personally cared little, if, indeed, he did not feel a certain satisfaction in confronting them. More than all those was the conviction that he must carry news of this night's work to Villetard and other Frenchmen in the city. His position as *attaché* to Bonaparte and immediate guardian of the safety of his countrymen demanded that much, and when the quarter of an hour had passed and the lacqueys did not return to speak of his gondola, he rang the bell impatiently, not a little angered at the delay.

But this time no one answered him. Not a sound was to be heard in the house. Gaston hastily donned his sword and cloak and determined to end the matter for himself. He went to the door of his room and opened it. The antechamber beyond it was in darkness. He returned for a candle, and finding the second door, a heavy door of mahogany, he turned the handle vainly.

The door was locked. He was the prisoner of the house.

He returned to the *salon* and set the candle in the stick again. To a friend he would have confessed that his heart beat a little wildly ; but his hand was steady and his head cool. That he was in a trap, a trap prepared by a woman who, he had begun to believe, would awaken the knowledge of womanhood within him, even his admiration for and faith in Beatrice de St. Remy could not deny. And was this faith misplaced ? Was he but a child in folly paying to the uttermost farthing for his credulity ? He was almost compelled to believe it. Premonition said that he might lose his life in the house—as others of his countrymen had lost theirs in the dark places of Venice. He knew that the work he had done in saving many of his countrymen from the hands of the assassin and the cloaked vengeance of the Savi had earned for him the hostility and the unavowed dislike of the Senate, and even of the people. Was the mistress of this house the agent of these ? Gaston was not very willing to think so ; but the idea forced itself upon him and compelled him to take it into account.

He set the candle down, we say, and listened intently for any sound. The *salon* itself interested him anew, and he remarked a door at its further end which he had, indeed, already observed, but with no particular curiosity. Now, however, he tried the handle of it, and, finding it unlocked, he passed through and entered a second apartment, lighted as the first by many wax candles and furnished also in the French fashion. Here was a bed with a stately canopy and a Buhl writing-table with a clock in the

panel—books also in multi-coloured bindings gave a bright air to the heavy furniture, while many of the appointments were of silver. These evidences of wealth interested Gaston less, however, than the more personal preparations for his comfort. All that a young man of fashion might need for his toilet was set out upon the table near the window; a flagon of wine stood upon a buffet—and more significant still, a complete suit in silk and velvet, such a suit as any Venetian of position might wear, lay spread, garment by garment, upon his bed. "She would make a Venetian of me," Gaston said; but the circumstance reassured him, nevertheless, for no woman, he argued, would wish to dress a man up in fine clothes that her servants might throw him from her windows. Very far from it, for his shrewd judgment told him that my lady had some purpose in offering him this disguise, and it could not be any other than the security he might find therein. Greatly relieved, he examined the room more at his leisure, and trying one of the two large windows by which it was lighted, he discovered that it opened readily and showed him the black shape of a tree, and beneath that, when he shaded a candle from the wind, an old fountain with a broken faun and an empty marble basin. He remembered the Casa degli Spiriti for one of the few houses in Venice which possess a garden, such as it was, and saw that the presbytery of the church of San Zaccaria lay beyond the high wall. Let a man pass safely across the rusted *chevaux de frise* and he would find himself in that narrow canal, by which he might

regain the Riva degli Schiavoni. The idea thrust itself upon Gaston while he stood at the window ; and then, more to his liking even than the idea, was the sound of a man singing—in a gondola, no doubt—such a wild jarring note, so strange from an Italian throat, that he laughed at its very discord.

“By all that’s wonderful—it is Joseph Villetard,” he said.

And this surprised him more than anything he had heard in the house.

CHAPTER V

THE FRIEND OF THE FRIEND

AT five o'clock upon the afternoon following Gaston's adventure at the Casa degli Spiriti, a servant entered the library of the Palazzo Burano to inform my Lord of Brescia that the Chevalier Joseph Villetard desired to see him upon an affair of urgency. Very much surprised at this, and but little prepared for that imposing display he was careful to make before strangers, my lord would have excused himself but for the presence of Madame la Marquise, who had hardly heard the name of the visitor when she ordered him to be admitted. When the servant withdrew, a momentary difference of opinion prevented the astonished Lorenzo even from arranging his purple cloak upon a chair—and this fact he regretted for some days afterwards.

"I positively cannot see the man, Marquise ; you know that I do not receive to-day."

"But, my Lord, this man does not present himself at any house twice."

"If you think, Beatrice, that it would be wiser
——"

"He is coming up the stairs, my Lord. Yes, that will do—but I would rest the chin upon the hand ; it becomes you better so. The *affaire* Joyeuse brings him here, no doubt. You will be firm, Lorenzo. We know nothing of this—we have everything to hear."

"A great deal more than will be pleasant, no doubt. Well, if you wish it, Madame la Marquise." A courtly emphasis rounded off the sentence for the emissary's benefit, and Joseph Villetard, coming into the room with cat-like tread, discovered my lord wearing an air of paternal benevolence, while Beatrice, seated upon the ivory couch near the window, might have been the cherished daughter listening dutifully to her father's goodly admonition. Villetard, however, was the last man in Venice to be deceived by such an artifice. Although he had been but twenty-four hours in the city he was perfectly well aware both of my lady's influence and of Lorenzo's reputation for sagacity and other statesmanlike qualities ; and he understood that these two had been preparing themselves to answer him since they heard his name.

"Madame," he said, bowing low to Beatrice, "I am fortunate in this encounter. And you, my Lord, I regret that these letters should reach you from such a reluctant messenger. My grief, however, needs no apology, since it is for one I mourn as my own brother."

"It is, indeed, deplorable," interposed my lord, with the readiness of a genius in the *maladroit*, and while Beatrice opened her eyes very widely and

stared both at him and at Villetard, he would have recovered himself with a *riposte* which was little less than fatuous.

"You speak of General Bonaparte's departure from Gratz, Chevalier. Of course, we must regard that from different points of view. I, for instance, as a staunch servant of this Republic, can, I trust, still find sympathy for those of the General's friends who regret that the enterprise is abandoned and the alliance between Venice and your master confirmed beyond any cavil. At the same time, as an Italian, I rejoice—frankly, I rejoice, Chevalier, and am honest enough to confess the same even to you."

The speech pleased Lorenzo very much, and he leaned back in his chair as though to measure upon Villetard's countenance the full worth of it. But Villetard's face wore the oddest of expressions, and fleshy rivulets of contempt and amusement had formed upon either side of his ill-shaped mouth. He was looking at Beatrice when he answered Lorenzo.

"Honesty is a great virtue in these days, my Lord, I thank you for your confidence. If my master, General Bonaparte, has left Gratz and moved his army upon Verona——"

"You don't say so!" gasped Lorenzo. "But that would be a crime against us, Chevalier."

"A question for the diplomatists, my Lord. Crime is a word we leave behind us with the women at such times as these. You will excuse me the argument—and yet I came to speak of crime to those who must lend a readier ear than General Bonaparte is likely to be troubled with.

Let me name it without delay : you are acquainted with the Comte de Joyeuse, my Lord !”

Lorenzo glanced at Beatrice, whose deep breathing had not escaped the emissary's vigilant eye ; but feigning a very negligent interest he rejoined idly—“The young Frenchman who has taken upon himself the quite unnecessary office of *agent provocateur* in the city—do you speak of him, Chevalier ?”

The Chevalier continued in his mildest voice—

“Of no other—General Bonaparte's aide-de-camp sent to Venice when your police were no longer able to protect either the lives or the property of my countrymen. My Lord, the Count is dead—he was assassinated near the church of San Zaccaria last night. My servants were the witnesses of that atrocious crime, for which your city must pay a heavy penalty later on. If I come to you to speak first of it, set it down to your known influence and your acknowledged wisdom. I loved the Count as my own brother, and I am determined that I will not rest until he is avenged. My Lord, this I came to tell you. I doubt not that you will find me an unwelcome messenger.”

Now, the emissary had really come to the Palazzo Burano to learn how much my Lady Beatrice knew of his friend's disappearance, and although he affected to address Lorenzo, his half-shut eyes were fixed upon the Marquise, and he could have recounted afterwards every shadow of emotion which crossed her handsome face. And first he read great surprise there, and then fear ; and, upon fear, he

could detect the quick working of a subtle mind which was weighing the circumstances for and against, until finally a certain content gave a new and happier expression to her countenance, and she leaned back upon the sofa and became again the mistress of her self-possession.

"Chevalier," she said, "if your servants witnessed the death of Monsieur de Joyeuse, why did they not arrest the assassins that the police may punish them?"

Lorenzo applauded this. He tried to think that it was just what he would have said himself.

"Of course, of course—it is incredible," he exclaimed; "no one would believe such a story. Your friend left Venice for his own reasons and will return. I am not his guardian, Chevalier—I know nothing either of his going or coming. If the Count has disappeared, well, young men have their reasons. You and I have been young ourselves. I trust that our temporary absence from the house of our fathers has never laid so great an accusation against a people. You will see, Chevalier, that you find us incredulous."

My lord of Brescia could wear the air of amused paternity as well as any man in Venice; and for his reputation's sake be it said that it became him as well as any other. For himself he had not the smallest doubt that the Count of Joyeuse had reaped at last the fruit of his own misplaced zeal and been struck down in some secret place of the city. But the man was no friend of his, he said—he would not have known him had he met him face to face;

and if some bravo had ridden the Senate of the sharpest thorn in its flesh, who was he, Lorenzo, to complain? Joseph Villetard, however, cared nothing for the man or the argument. His eyes were fixed upon my lady's scarlet cheek when he said—

"Incredulity is not always wisdom, my Lord. I appeal to Madame la Marquise. She will defend the Count, I am sure. Is it not so, Madame? You differ from my Lord? I can see that you do; and this permits me to say that if my witnesses are mistaken, then I am sorry that Venice should be compelled to answer so grave a charge upon such a sorry pretext. I do not believe that it is so, however, and when I write to my master to-night——"

He dwelt a little upon the words, waiting for Beatrice to look up; and in this he was not disappointed, for she turned immediately, and her eyes meeting his, he said, "My friend is safe, he is in her house."

"Do you speak of General Bonaparte as your master, Chevalier?" she asked him.

"Since I have no other—yes, Madame. I speak of the greatest soldier that lives among us to-day, who will one day judge you and your people. He must know first that this crime has been committed—and, believe me, Madame, I am glad that a letter stands between me and his anger. To you, my Lord, I would say—what influence you have with the Inquisitors, let it be turned to your defence without delay. The assassins must be found, Madame; justice must be done. I will rest neither night nor day until my poor friend is avenged.

That is the oath, my Lord, of a man not given to oaths. I beg you remember it."

He rose to take his leave, but not before Lorenzo, aware suddenly of what this might mean and the consequences that might ensue, had implored both delay and consideration.

"I cannot believe it—I refuse to," he reiterated again and again. "At least defer your letter to General Bonaparte until some inquiries be made. Such a crime would be detested by every honest man in Venice, Chevalier. I repudiate it in the name of the citizens."

"Repudiation, my Lord, is a very negative virtue. Your Republic, it appears, has done little but repudiate for many weeks past. When General Bonaparte is here, I trust that repudiation will save you, but I cannot forbear the advice that a little zeal in the protection of my countrymen, and some measure of justice upon their murderers, would be more acceptable to my master. Please think of that. And to Madame, a wise word—the friend of the friend is dangerous. I leave her with that."

He bowed with curt grace, and Lorenzo following him to the great staircase, he changed his tone suddenly to advise my lord that the friendship of General Bonaparte might yet be the most precious possession of which Venice could boast; and from that passed to speak of the commonest affairs—of my lord's pictures and the beauties of the house, and other trivial subjects, to Lorenzo's great perplexity. But his last word was both



A man we could very well do without

Page 1

peremptory and even threatening, for he demanded again the names of the assassins and immediate judgment upon them, and added, "The Senate must make an example, my Lord ; and, from all I hear, it will concern you little whether the innocent or the guilty be judged. See to it that it is done without delay" ; and with that he quitted the house and was rowed away in his gondola.

Lorenzo, however, did not immediately return to his apartment ; but catching the ear of Noello, his valet, he said, "There goes a man we could very well do without" ; and Noello, being a faithful servant, went down to the *bravi's* kitchen, and looking through the barred windows, he repeated the words, "There goes a man we could very well do without," which vague remark waked Zucca, the bravo, from his sleep and sent others to the window to stare after the gondola. My lord in the meantime returned to Beatrice and asked her what might be the meaning of Villetard's wise word that the friend of the friend is dangerous.

"Do you know the man, then ? Were you acquainted with him in Paris ? I remarked the attention with which he favoured you. The friend of the friend—surely he does not mean to say that you are known to the Count of Joyeuse ?"

Beatrice, who had spoken but twice while Villetard was in the room and had been thinking deeply since he left it, suddenly turned to Lorenzo and addressed him with great animation.

"I do not profess to read oracles, my Lord ; and there is no need of your Delphic wisdom,

believe me. You ask me if I know Joseph Villettard—I say, ‘Yes.’ I knew him in Paris five years ago for the shrewdest lawyer the Convention could employ. If you value your interest with Napoleon, conciliate him. The friend of the friend is sometimes less useful than the friend of the enemy. Conciliate Joseph Villettard and you are doing more for Venice than the Signori have done for many a long day. That is a woman’s wisdom—she gives it you for what it is worth.”

Lorenzo plucked at his long beard a little thoughtfully—it was evident that he had some compassion for her sex and pitied her fatuous longing for a French alliance.

“If I were to preach that from the people’s tribune, they would hang me between the columns of the Piazzetta. No, my child, resolution is our watchword, glove for glove and threat for threat. If the Comte de Joyeuse be dead—well, what then? Are we to become policemen because the French descend upon us like locusts? I say, let the Senate repudiate the deed and regret it. We can do that with light hearts since the dead do not return.”

“And yet, Lorenzo, before many weeks are passed you may be ready to give half your fortune to restore this man to life—you and the wise men who work with you. Do you think that Villettard’s master will be content with your repudiations—now when he is knocking at your gate and you have not a thousand honest men to shut it in his face. No, indeed. You may live to pray for the miracle; and these, my dear Lord, as your master Voltaire has

taught you, are not the days of miracles. Let that go into your oration. It will be the kindest deed you have done for many a long day."

My lord shook his fine head a little sadly.

"You are a woman, and you do not always understand," he said; "moreover, Villetard may never speak. I count the chances and take them. This man's silence may be one of them."

"My Lord, you have always loved high stakes—at least I admire your courage. If this man's silence be your high card, well, I don't envy you when you play it."

"You do not understand," my lord repeated—and he was thinking of the words he had spoken to Noello, the valet.

It would be a strange thing, my lord said, if he could not find a short way with such a man as Joseph Villetard; and this idea pleasing him greatly, he presently took pen and paper, and began to prepare such a defence as might serve the city when the charge was made. Hercin he relied greatly upon my lady's eloquence; and she, falling in with the humour of it, helped him to dictate a screed which denounced the late Gaston, Comte de Joyeuse, as a traitor to his own country and a spy within the city of Venice.

But if my lord had observed her closely, Lorenzo would have remarked an abstraction of manner entirely foreign to her—for in plain truth, Beatrice, Marquise de St. Remy, told herself as she wrote that her prisoner in the Casa degli Spiriti might yet save the city from Bonaparte's anger.

CHAPTER VI

THE ATTACK

JOSEPH VILLETARD quitted the Palazzo Burano in a very easy frame of mind, for he had satisfied himself entirely as to the whereabouts of his friend, the Comte de Joyeuse.

"Gaston is at the Casa degli Spiriti," he argued. "Excellent quarters; I would willingly change my own for them. Madame, too, is divine—a head that Velasquez should have painted and Paris loved. Yes, Gaston has done very well for himself, and those who say that she nails throats to the Church of the Frari are most obliging liars. Madame la Marquise pleases me. A head of her own; eyes to see with, black and violet and reading deep. I wonder what she thinks of me. Not very much, Master Joseph—you do not please her at all. She said, as plainly as she could say it, 'This man may be dangerous, I will conciliate him.' Gaston goes to her house to be saved from the old man's assassins. A monstrous paternal rogue that—self, self, self from the sole of his foot to the top of his crown. Not a scruple in him. He was talking to his valet as

I came out. I shouldn't wonder if the fellow were following me now."

His gondola had set him down upon the piazetta, upon his way to Florian's for supper, and, being quite alone, he began to look about him with some vague uneasiness, for it was quite dark and he could make nothing of the figures which moved swiftly in the shadows. If he regretted that he had left the ancient Zannuchio at his hotel, it was not lack of courage, but a concession to prudence, which said, they will value your body at twenty ducats—so much and no more. And a man lives but once and is a fool to die because a *bravo* has been hired and the lamps are few, and a cry in the night is heeded no more than a woman's laugh. Villetard admitted that he had been foolish, but he pushed on beneath the colonnade, choosing the middle path and using his ears as one trained to pursuit and its perils. Most of the shops were shut by this time, and of those who moved abroad, some were merry-makers who would sup at the casinos of the islands, while others were upon their way to the opera or the theatre of San Luca. Many a dainty glimpse did the emissary catch of stockinged ankle and laughing eyes plainly to be seen in the aureole of torch or flambeau; and he reflected, with some irony of the remembrance, that even the name of Bonaparte could not keep these Venetians from their pleasures. Here they were, marrying and giving in marriage, loving and shameless in love, crowding the theatres, gaming at the casinos, flaunting their vices in every stranger's face, an idle, dissolute race that must pre-

sently submit to the iron hand of conquest ; and not one of them had the leisure to ask what the morrow might bring, or how the Corsican's victory would affect him or her. Even at this eleventh hour, the raucous voice of carnival was as loud, the antics of old Tamburino as childish, the water-side pantomime as puerile and as popular as any the great Gozzi had defended. Venice laughed and ogled upon her moribund way. She would not have the energy even to regret that which she could not defend, Villetard said—and with one scornful reiteration of contempt, he took up the thread of the argument again, and went back to Gaston.

“ My friend is quite safe at the Casa degli Spiriti,” he argued, “ and it has happened very well. I shall write to the General to-night, to say that we fear the worst, and things will then go a bit faster. Bonaparte will certainly be moved by such a story as this, and these poltroons will pay the price for their homage to ‘ Monsieur,’ and their love of Master Facing-both-ways. Yes, it is very fortunate, since at one stroke I silence Madame la Marquise, and settle old scores with——”

A shadow upon the pavement, which the light of a stray oil lamp in a doorway lengthened and made intensely black, interrupted these pleasant reflections, and caused the emissary to remember his own warning, and the prudent counsels he had recently bestowed upon himself. An adept in all that concerned the shadowing of men, he knew now that his surmise had been correct, and that some one followed him from the Palazzo Burano. Instantly,

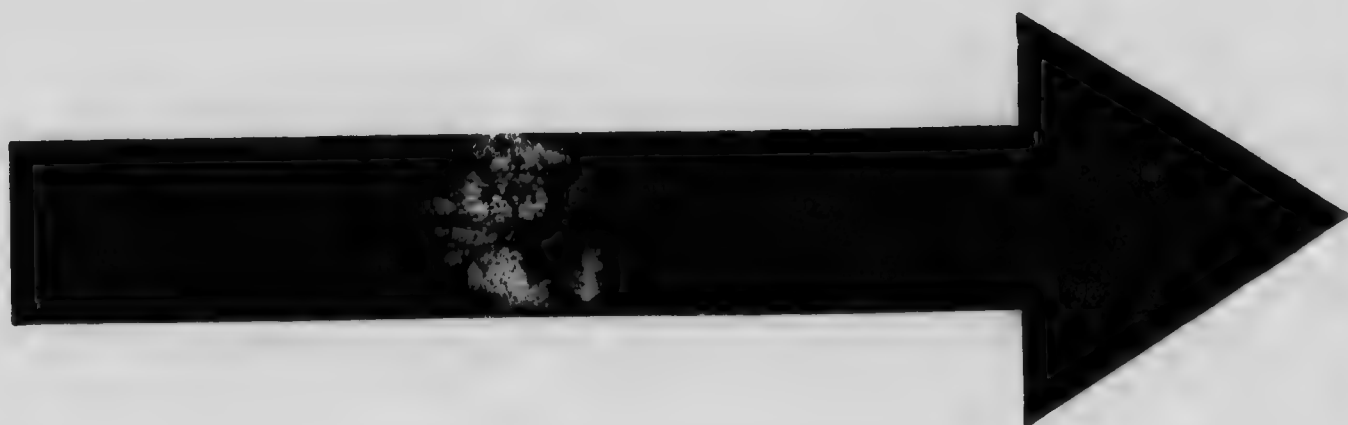
the blackest tales which Venice had been able to tell him flashed through his mind, and he recalled his interview with Gaston yesterday, and the story of Chateaudun nailed to the throat to the door of the Frari, and Rampeau, and Sevenses, and the many others who, perchance, had died on such a night as this; and his hand closed upon the hilt of his sword, and he quickened his steps, and wondered that he should be so much afraid.

"Certainly I should have brought Zannuchio," was his reflection as he began, like one who plays a game of hide and seek, to number his chances and to pick the best of them. A younger man, perchance, would have been all for the open—the great square itself upon which he was about to debouch and the clear heaven above him, and, it might be, the young voice raised in youth's appeal; but Joseph Villetard knew something of the Italian and his disposition towards the French, and he said wisely, "Though a hundred men were supping in yonder *café*, not one would lift a finger to save me." And this was as true as the irony of the scene and the hour—for there, across the dark piazza, were the lights of Florian's, and here from a house upon his right hand was a veiled woman going out upon a man's arm, and a torch to cast a golden patch upon the flags below and the roof of a colonnade above, and a servant to follow them for prudence' sake. Villetard quickened his step and walked a little way in the torch's light, until, indeed, the servant turned about, and, perceiving he was a Frenchman, abruptly bade him begone.

He thanked the fellow with a fine courtesy ; but the delay cost him a precious minute, and he knew—for every right instinct told him—that the men who followed him were close upon his heels, hidden there in the black darkness of the colonnade. And the question in his mind now was this, should he throw dignity to the winds, and take to his heels ; or, playing a bolder part, seek fortune of the unforeseen, and win safety in attack. The latter idea was much to his taste. He argued rightly that the same darkness which hid him from his enemies must conceal his movements from them ; and putting the matter to the test, he stepped into a doorway, and there stood so close to the wall that a hand stretched out to touch his might well have missed its mark. Here he had rested but a moment, his sword unsheathed and his cloak flung aside, when a pattering of steps upon the flags and the whisper of a voice in the darkness told him that his unknown friends had come up to the place and were as yet in ignorance of the ruse he had played on them—an ignorance which carried them thirty or forty yards up the colonnade, and would have taken them further but for the presence of a watcher at the further end, who whistled softly and was immediately answered. Brave man as Villetard was, this witness to so close a plan could not but haunt him ; and he began to believe himself compassed about by enemies on all sides, and so desperately beset that nothing but the darkness could save him. He could hear the footsteps hither, thither, now heavy and distinct, now distant and faltering ;

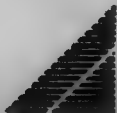
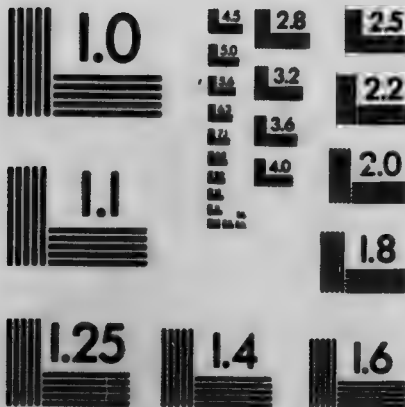
and as they drew near or receded from him, so did hope befriend or fail him. Once, indeed, he was upon the point of quitting his refuge and boldly running across the *piazza*, but before he had taken a single step, a whisper of voices almost in his ear warned him how ill he had placed his enemies ; and he crouched back still further into the doorway and forced himself to admit that by his sword alone would the light be won.

A full quarter of an hour passed in the tense doubt of this suspense. The sudden check coming upon the suspicion that their victim had entered some house and so escaped them loosed the *bravi's* tongues and brought three of them together in an open place of the square, where their figures could be plainly seen against the black façade of the lofty buildings and their voices heard by Villetard. He gathered two facts from their brief sentences—that one of them was called Zucca, and considered himself the captain of the company ; and that the others were in some danger of hunger and thirst for many weeks to come if they did not instantly do something to satisfy their employer and earn their wages. Villetard had feared for an instant that the obvious expedient of torch or lantern would occur to one of them—but he reminded himself that such *canaille* were very naturally partial to the darkness, and would on no account whatever be discovered in their employment. Indeed, their incoherent counsels and wild oaths gave him some new confidence, and he was ready to say that directly they spread abroad again to beat a wider covert, he



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would hesitate no longer, but run boldly for the *café*—and this intention he certainly would have carried out if it had not been that a new factor entered suddenly into his reckoning, and so unexpectedly that it found him no less surprised than his pursuers. In plain truth, the door behind him opened without any warning, and two men coming out with lanterns in their hands, they stumbled upon him immediately and roughly asked his business.

"My business is my life," he said as readily; "those gentlemen over there have followed me from the Palazzo Burano. For the honour of your name, Signore, give me shelter until I can summon my friends."

One of the two, a burly shopkeeper, who had had some dealings with the French, and not to his profit, held his lantern close to Villetard's face and inspected it a little brutally.

"You are a Frenchman, are you not?" he asked.

"I do not pretend to deny it," rejoined Villetard; "my nationality, Signore, should give me some claims upon your hospitality."

The burly merchant appeared to hesitate, until his friend pulled him by the sleeve and drew him aside.

"This is an affair for the police, Benevelli—do you want them in your house for a month? Besides," he added, "what a very unpleasant face!"

The merchant nodded his head and went on—

"I will speak to your friends," he called back.

"Why do you not hear what they have got to say? It's all nonsense, Signore; they are only laughing at you."

The pair went on down the colonnade, and Villetard followed them doggedly. He was determined to make them the witnesses of the assault—and herein he was successful, for he had not taken twenty steps when he became aware that the bravos were upon his heels, and, turning adroitly, he thrust at the first figure he saw, while he cried loudly—

"This is the way we laugh in Paris, Signore; now you see your cursed hospitality."

A low groan answered him, and the clinging blade told him that he had struck home. To himself he said, "I must guard my face," and with that idea he fenced high in *quarte* and *sixte* riposting with a master hand, and trusting rather to his quickness than to any subtlety of attack. Such light as he had came from the chinks of a shuttered window, and it struck obliquely across his blade as he worked his way to the wall, and, setting his back against the shutters of the shop, racked his mind for a ruse which might help his sword. That he had accounted for one of the rogues he was very sure, for even the clashing steel could not drown the dismal groans which were uttered to the shadows, and, moreover, those who attacked him called back to their comrade that they would help him presently. Villetard, as far as the light permitted, judged that there were four of them. They fought with the lightest kind of rapier, and their faces were masked

like their courage—even the odds put no great heart into them, and they stood so far away that attack and lunge were alike impotent. Villetard, however, imagined that patience was their best ally, and when his resolution had ebbed a little there came to him that sickening apprehension which attends a conviction that the worst must befall whatever the individual effort. These men would wear him out—he who had such a work to do for the General and for France, must die here at the hands of these scullions of a coward's kitchen, whose reward would be a silver ducat. Exasperation, contempt—but, above all, a chilly fear, heavy and terrible to bear, were the emotions which chiefly troubled him; but they could not rob him of his nerve, or turn for an instant the skill of his attack. There was no better fencer in Paris—unhappily, fence served him ill in such a place.

He had just come to this conclusion when the first stratagem was played upon him and rewarded with no little success. One of the *bravi* dropped upon his hands and knees beneath a trellis of swords, and, making a feint as though to strike upward with a poniard, he drew Villetard's eye down to him for an instant, and one of the others profiting by it, he thrust at the Frenchman's heart with so fierce a blow that his blade snapped as though it had been struck upon an anvil. Astonished that his antagonist did not fall, the man cried out to his comrades to run in and finish him—but the fellow upon his knees had been pricked in the chest already and was roaring like a bull, while the other

two, taking advantage of the stroke in *octave*, rushed together upon their man and struck repeatedly at his heart and back until all fell together upon the pavement, and there lay worrying together like dogs upon a bone. This, however, was not the greater surprise, for at the very height of the *mêlée*, when the Italians were tumbling one upon the other in their eagerness, and Villetard cried "France! France!" with all his lungs, the door of the house behind him was opened without any warning, and a man, peering out with a torch in his hand, observed the ugly spectacle, and forthwith took his part in it. A humble secretary to the Proveditore, the newcomer had no desire whatever that the police should put a mark against his door—and so, without any ceremony, he began to beat the prone figures with the flaming torch; and the sparks falling and the fire running upon their necks and faces, the men turned upon him with blows and curses. They would have carried it further had they not recognised him in the glare of the light and thus become aware of their own danger; but the figure was familiar to them and stood for authority, to which above all else they turned a meek face; and the apparition scattered them like straw before the wind. Villetard heard them running away down the Piazzetta towards the water; and when one of them called back to another that it did not matter since their man was dead, a sour smile crossed his ugly face.

"We shall see how much it matters," he said, struggling to his feet; and then to the secretary—"You were just in time, Signore, with that battle-

axe of yours. May I know to whom I am indebted for the somewhat considerable privilege of living?"

The secretary, coaxing the torch to burn again, looked at the Frenchman over the top of it.

"No thanks to me," he rejoined with some ill-humour. "How's a man to sleep with this going on outside his door. Besides, you're a Frenchman—you may well speak of the considerable privilege of living. I wonder the Savi don't hang the lot of you—I would."

Villetard, rubbing his sore shoulders and making sure that he had come to no great harm, persisted at the same time in his gratitude.

"I like a thorough man," he said, "and I do not intend to quarrel with you, Signore. Some of my countrymen would be no loss—it's possible to say the same for a great many of yours. Come, I shall insist upon thanking you. Your battle-axe is splendid—but a trifle dangerous to your friends. These burns upon my hands——"

"You ought to be dead," the man interrupted. "I don't understand it. I never saw a man get up before after such a trouncing as you had. But there—nothing can kill you people. You must have skins of leather."

"Of steel," Villetard corrected amiably. "You see, I am aware of your little prejudices, Signore, and anticipate them. A vest of mail."

"Ah! that's it, then. I never thought of that. Well, don't set the fashion. We can spare a good many of you and not feel lonely."

He went in and shut the door unceremoniously ;

but Villetard, still smiling a little, continued upon his way to Florian's, and there supped off a fat capon and a bottle of Armagnac. Save for a little disorder of his dress and a sharp cut upon his left wrist, his bruised bones were the only witnesses to the brawl ; but he had been taught a wholesome lesson, nevertheless, and he determined that no circumstance whatever should induce him to go abroad again without escort in this city of assassins and poltroons.

"The Ancient was right," he argued. "I must think of my honourable life—and, after all, there is no great glory in dying at a church door."

He smiled again, and while the waiter served his supper he began to scribble upon a little sheet of paper the first lines of that letter wherein Bonaparte was to learn of the death of Gaston, Comte de Joyeuse—whom he had loved as a brother. The task amused the Chevalier greatly. He called it his "little bill"—and to himself he said that he would give much to be at Gratz when the General added it up.

In truth was Joseph Villetard a pleasant lover of a lie.

CHAPTER VII

GASTON DECIDE

JOSEPH VILLETARD was not blessed with a musical voice ; in truth his tones were harsh and rasping and lent themselves to anything but dulcet harmonies. Nevertheless, to Gaston, who heard them from the window of the Casa degli Spiriti, they were sweeter than celestial songs, and so greatly reassuring that the Count immediately put aside any scruples he might have had and declared himself almost as safe under the roof of Madame la Marquise as in his mother's house at Passy. For what brought the emissary to the Church of San Zaccaria if not his friend's safety ? And to whom could that safety be entrusted with greater confidence than to Joseph Villetard, the ablest, the most tireless servant of their common master, Bonaparte ? Gaston never doubted for a moment that Villetard would probe this intrigue to its heart, and if he found it dangerous, would not delay in making known to the General the perilous situation in which one of his servants was placed.

Henceforth, then, a new confidence and a curiosity

not at all displeasing to the hussar's vanity. Madame la Marquise had lured him to her house, Gaston said, upon a pretext of his personal safety, and, when the ruse succeeded, her interest in him was so considerable that bolts and bars and iron grilles must bear witness to it. "This woman would keep me because she loves me," the argument ran; and it was a pretty argument, to be toyed with and petted as the velvet leaves of a hidden rose. He did not fear her, never had feared her since first he came to Venice, and he feared her not at all here in her house by the Church of Zaccaria where the doors were bolted and the windows barred against him. "Villetard will open the gate in good time," he said, "but meanwhile I will hear the Marquise." A confession from such lips could not disappoint him; he slept in the hope of it, a sound sleep with his sword at the bed's head and a dream of black eyes and blush-rose lips pressed near to his own.

It needed more than a locked door to keep Gaston de Joyeuse awake; indeed, he scarcely moved in his bed until the young man, Giovanni Galla, entered the room at seven o'clock upon the following morning and drew the curtains at his bidding.

"Well, young man, and what have you to say to me this morning?"

"To ask your Excellency if you will be pleased to take coffee or chocolate?"

"Honest, at least; they give the prisoner of the house his choice, then?"

"Prisoner, Excellency ; surely that is a very hard word."

A finer pretence never was. Here stood this meek youth, awe and wonder and reproach in his striking black eyes, and there lay Gaston watching him with amused patience, as one watches, half-waked, from a bed which is restful. An accomplished liar truly, the hussar said ; and yet so pleasant a one that lying might rank among the virtues.

"You bolt and bar my doors, clap a grille before my windows, do not answer to my call, and then gib at the word. Come, young man, you had better be frank with me."

"I am quite frank, Excellency. The door was bolted, yes, the window barred—but in each case for your own safety. You know Venice, Excellency ; you know its servants. You will not blame us, therefore, if we know the'n too. What should we say to our mistress when she returns to-day ?"

"To-day. Are you quite sure it is to-day, Giovanni ?"

"She will await your Excellency in the garden at twelve o'clock."

"And it is now——"

"Seven o'clock, Excellency. You slept late."

Gaston sprang from his bed and began to dress himself with unusual care. Giovanni, the steward, for he was plainly that, moved quietly about the rooms and presently called in lacqueys and a valet to assist his guest. The valet was so silent a fellow that Gaston came to the conclusion that he must be

dumb; but just when he was in the act of putting his razors away and the others had gone into the *salon* to serve coffee, he recovered his tongue and addressed the Count without any preface.

"Your Excellency has friends in Venice, I believe?"

"Many friends—why do you ask me?"

"Because I carry a message from one of them."

"Ha!—that is why the dumb speak then!"

"Yes, but not where others listen, Excellency; and as I have ventured to tell your Excellency, the sun can be very kind to us in February."

Gaston nodded his head, observing that the steward had re-entered the room; and as it was plain to him that the valet's message did not concern the celestial elements at all, he waited patiently for another opportunity. When it came, he put a leading question which brought them straight to the point.

"You come from the Chevalier Villetard?"

"That is the name of your friend, Excellency."

"And his message?"

"That he is exceedingly obliged to you for the opportunities which your visit to this house permit him. He begs that your Excellency will remain Madame's guest for some days at any rate."

"Oh—then he knows that I am here?"

"I had the honour to tell him so, Excellency."

"I trust it was a profitable honour?"

"Thank you. I find your countrymen as generous as I am sure you will be, my Lord."

Here was the old story—the hand in the dish and

the ducat in the hand. Gaston understood that while Madame boasted of the fidelity of her servants, and the young man Giovanni declared that they would die for her, one of them was equally ready for a louis or less to depart this life (in protestation) for the honourable French in the city. Plainly the message came from Villetard, though it might not have done so. Gaston was a slow thinker where diplomacy was at stake, but he divined immediately that he must remain at the Casa degli Spiriti for the good of the cause. And a cause certainly must be good which brought him to anchor in such a house.

He gave the valet a ducat and went on with his dressing. The rooms themselves were very homelike ; their artistic treasures lost nothing by the bright sunshine which the uncurtained windows admitted. Particularly was Gaston impressed by the restrained taste of the various artistic objects and of the thought which their arrangement had demanded. He liked the old books lying to the touch of his hand ; the miniatures in the little gold frames ; the writing-table with its crisp white paper and writing quills. A man might do well here, he imagined, far better than roving about at the head of a regiment of scoundrels who plundered the houses, killed the men, ill-treated the women, and admired only such treasures of Italy as might be stored conveniently in the regimental waggons. The Casa degli Spiriti spoke of art, wealth, elegance ; but to Gaston chiefly it stood for the home of an exceedingly beautiful woman who had scattered her roses in his path and



Gaston meets his captor.

[Page 5.]

then had trapped him in so dainty a cage. Gaston liked the cage, but would not sing alone there. Perhaps he was not wholly conscious of the depth of his own feeling until, looking from his window when the lacquey had carried the coffee away, he beheld the Marquise herself waiting for him by the fountain with the broken faun. And miracle—the windows of the room were open!

Gaston traversed the veranda with impatient step, and, descending a winding stone stair at the end of it, he confronted my lady instantly. A great tale he had to tell her—and yet, for the life of him, when he found himself face to face with her he could not utter a single sentence of it, so close did that vision of queenly dignity and dazzling radiant beauty stand to him. It had been dark in the chapels of St. Mark, and he had never thus confronted her in the city before. Gaston could not speak for wonder. Even a fool's tongue might have stuck at a compliment before Beatrice de St. Remy.

"Well, my Lord Count, am I so little forgiven, then—you do not complain?"

She held out a little hand, ivory white, and so slender and tapering, that it was lost in the hussar's great paw. But he bent and kissed it with a soldier's habit; and then he dared to look at the black eyes which had mesmerised him so surely.

"My Lady," he said quite honestly, "I could charge you with many things, but it shall be first with kindness. If your reasons for bringing me to this house were mistaken, I am none the less grateful to them. I will begin with that, a Frenchman's

thanks to the Frenchman's wife, who believes that she is serving him."

It was all very finely said, but not a little absurd withal, to hear this bandying of compliments between two who had been intimate in the unspoken tongue of leaf and flower for many a long week past in the chapel of St. Mark's. Perhaps it occurred to Madame that it was so, for she burst into a hearty laugh, and withdrawing her hand, still warm with his kiss, she answered him a little disdainfully.

"Who believes, Monsieur de Joyeuse—the woman who believes! What audacious creature is she, then, to drag you from your house, to invite your suspicion, to imperil her own future and liberty, because she believes! No, no, Monsieur de Joyeuse, we do not believe at the Casa degli Spiriti—we know. Had you not slept beneath my roof last night, to-day would charge me with a graver crime than the many I have committed in your interests. Let us go where we may speak of it; at least, these conspirators are permitted to eat."

She returned to the house, to a little white *salon* upon the first floor, where luncheon was served to them, and coffee afterwards in a second room giving upon the veranda, yet so placed at an angle of the house that Gaston could overlook the Campo before the church and discern something of the lazy life upon the narrow waterway without. Her conversation was animated and accompanied by expressive gesture, now that of a woman, now of the excited child who must speak while there is

opportunity. She had a hundred questions to ask of France, of its people, its new republic and of the terrible days of the dreadful years. But she did not mention Bonaparte while the servants were in the room; and it was not until the young man, Giovanni Galla, had received her whispered instructions, and had closed both the doors of the *salon*, that she took up again the subject so near to their desires.

"I trust my servants," she said, a little apologetically; "and, since I do not wish to be deceived, I tell them nothing. That is a sure road to probity, Monsieur de Joyeuse. We can talk now; and, if you please, we will return to the woman who believes."

"In your case, Marquise, half the city would run."

Gaston really did not care about much serious talk. The wine had stimulated him—the presence of this beautiful woman, who was yet so girlish in every gesture and movement, invited him to that subtle bandying of confidences which men call friendship. Had Madame Beatrice sung to him to the accompaniment of a guitar, the act would have been justified by the hour and the scene, he thought. He could place my lady at half-length upon the bright blue couch with the silken strings twined about her ankles, and the rebellious hair veiling her eyes with a golden web. The conceit was very pleasing—'twas a pity she should so soon rob him of it.

"No," she said, a little distantly, "I am not here

to speak of my case, Monsieur de Joyeuse, nor of yours—we are but pieces upon the board. One here, one there missing when the day is done, and who will ask twice for us or care if it be so? Let us not deceive ourselves, you with distrust of my motives, I with a disbelief in your wisdom. You are the prisoner of the Casa degli Spiriti—but an unwilling prisoner who is ready to cry for liberty like a child for a sunbeam. You remember that I am a woman, and you say, ‘What judge is she of these things; why should I listen to her?’ I do not blame you. The men have believed so little in the genius of women that tradition has become a habit and incredulity a virtue. You distrust me, and by man’s creed you are right to do so. We will start from that point. It will be easier in the end, believe me, Count.”

Gaston heard her with interest and some disappointment. So far the affair had presented itself to him as in the main one of a woman’s interest and of her exaggerated notions of an imaginary personal danger. He perceived, however, that Madame was not as the other women he had known in Venice. He felt a little awed in her presence, and he recognised that in any combat of the intellect he would be speedily worsted. Such a sense of inferiority was not welcome. It led him to the desire of self-assertion and of a declaration of independence that his manhood demanded.

“My dear Marquise,” he said, “this is entirely unnecessary. I understand your motives perfectly

and am grateful for them. Let me say at once that, while I thank you, I attach but little importance to the rumours of which you speak. The others, yes—there have been strange things done and we have scores to settle—but surely General Bonaparte's aide-de-camp !”

He looked at her as one who should say, “It is incredible,” and she suffered the look with the patience which is bestowed upon an unthinking child.

“General Bonaparte's aide-de-camp !—yes, you are that,” she rejoined bitterly—“aide-de-camp to the man who sent you here as the ambassador of lies—yes, I must say it, aide-de-camp to one who would sell his father's honour for a ducat if it could bring him a league closer to our gates. An honourable office, Count—acquit me of my regret that I find you in it.”

“Since it is a woman's view, acquittal is a duty, Marquise. You are but repeating the parrot-cry of those who know nothing of General Bonaparte but that which they wish to know. Some day you will do penance upon your knees. Oh yes, I am no dreamer. I serve a great soldier, and I would serve no other if a kingdom were offered me. There is my creed, Marquise—I believe in the Corsican. You must make the best of it if we are to be friends.”

My lady liked his homage though she would not applaud it. She knew how difficult was the path she must tread ; and yet she followed it unswervingly. A foolish word, a whisper of the truth

between them would undo all. Not for an instant must she be guilty of such an error.

"I am very gentle with my friends, Count," she responded quickly, "but I expect their confidence. When that is won I say that they begin to understand me. Here is something to make it a little easier for us. Bear with me while you read."

She bent over to an *escritoire* wheeled near the couch and took from it a bundle of papers pinned together with a golden brooch. Gaston recognised them instantly, either for the originals or the copies of those secret documents which the Inquisitors were in the habit of issuing to their baser instruments in Venice. Turning them one by one, he thought that he read his own story for the last three months. No book in Italy could have interested him half as much.

Now this was the order of the documents.

In the first place a very close description of a certain Frenchman, aged about thirty years, fair-haired, a hussar in the service of Napoleon Bonaparte, known to the Inquisitors under the number Seven, staying at the White Lion Inn. And upon this the entry "Ceaseless vigilance."

In the second place a faithful account of the Frenchman's daily movements for two months—his visits to the houses of the French colony, to the palaces of citizens, to the churches, the theatres, the *cafés*, the casinos—even to the Chapel of St. Mark's. And upon this the entry, "*Fortuna sequatur.*"

In the third place, an instruction to the servant

Manduvina that his attendance at the morning Mass in the Chapel of the Sacrament should be unremitting.

In the fourth place, to the Custodi Otto and Vitale the word "*fac*" upon a sealed paper.

And lastly, the official testimony of the Signors of the Night that the person so described had quitted Venice and returned to the camp of his master at Gratz.

Gaston read the papers diligently, turning them over with fingers which lingered upon the sheets as though reluctant to forego the pleasures of the page. When he had quite finished, he looked at the Marquise—but she was leaning back against the blue drapery and her eyes were half closed.

"And so," he said reflectively, "this interesting number Seven has really been added up at Gratz, Marquise."

My lady did not open her eyes when she replied—

"The papers say so, Count."

"And yet, in other matters, they are singularly well acquainted with the gentleman's habits."

"Ignorance is sometimes wiser than knowledge."

"Implying that they are perfectly well aware that I am in your house."

"Implying it so little that, if they knew it, a regiment of your own hussars would not keep them from these doors."

"Then must I believe that your friendship for me is likely to be attended with some inconvenience?"

"Frankly it is. You force me to be plain. I wish to keep you in this house because I think Venice will

be better served by your life than by your death. Nothing more than that, Monsieur de Joyeuse. I am not serving you ; I am serving a country whose honour is very dear to me. Had it been otherwise, the Custodi would have been left to act upon their own judgment. You are acquainted with its severity, since Chateaudun was your friend."

Gaston sighed like a man overwhelmed with perplexities. The truth was that all this was very new to him ; the close surveillance to which he had been subjected in Venice, the importance which had been attached to his mission, and, above all, the danger which he had so narrowly escaped. In his simple way he told himself that his debt of gratitude to Beatrice de St. Remy could only be measured by the value he put upon his life. Undoubtedly her courage and daring had saved him from the assassin's knife, and in saving him had imperilled both her reputation, and it might be, her life. This he could not permit—he must leave the house at once, and it must never be known that he had been there.

"Yes, I knew Chateaudun—he was my friend," he blundered on ; "and now I begin to see, Marquise, that you have done me a very great service. Oh yes, you have saved my life, you, to whom I have not spoken until this day. And I don't thank you—I sit here like a booby, asking you questions for all the world as though I had the right to do so. But I am going to make amends—I shall leave here when it is dark, and then, as long as I live, I shall say—'I have a friend at the Casa degli Spiriti and I shall

never forget her.' Marquise, you will believe that I am sincere?"

Gaston, like many soldiers, was impulsive in his sincerity, and he rose from his seat as he spoke, and, dropping upon one knee beside her couch, he snatched the white hand and covered it with burning kisses. For a little while my lady suffered him, though she would pretend to laugh at the folly of it—and she turned her face towards the wall that he might not detect her heightened colour.

"What nonsense, my dear Count—yes, I must call it nonsense. Please let me have my hand. It is so difficult to serve one's country. You do not find it so, I can see. Now please to go away—we were speaking of the letters——"

Gaston, his face flushed and his heart beating wildly, would have given every louis of the fortune he possessed to have taken my Lady Beatrice in his arms and thanked her with a lover's kisses—but her manner, which for the moment had been tolerant, changed swiftly to that of cold dignity, and even displeasure, and he stumbled to his feet to protest anew—

"You have saved my life—I must thank you."

"You have done so, Count—there is no merit in repetition."

"But I cannot allow you to run any risks on my account. I must leave this house at once."

"Indeed; and so you would say to all the world, 'Here am I, the guest of the Marquise after all.'"

"Yes, but I shall go when it is dark and there is no one about."

"Oh, my dear Count, and you have lived three months in this city! No one about! Is it possible that you imagine such a thing can be?"

"Then you think I am still watched?"

"As frankly no. Those who spied upon you were sent upon a fool's errand at sundown yesterday. They will return, and where to if not to the house of the white rose? Remember the brief, Count. Turn the page in your hand."

He turned it as she bade him, and re-read the page, which spoke of their encounter in the Chapel of St. Mark, and of the white rose dropped upon the marble pavement. Gaston began to perceive her meaning.

"They know that I am not dead, and so they will watch any house where I am likely to be found."

"Exactly, and so closely that I must even forbid you to stand at the window of the garden until my servants permit you."

"You will watch them in turn, then?"

"At night all cats are grey, my dear Count."

"But your own danger—if they should miscarry—if they should find me here and the story were told. No, Marquise, I cannot permit it—I must leave the house to-night."

She laughed a silvery laugh.

"Beware, Count!" she cried.

"Of what?"

"Of the window. You see how soon one forgets."

Gaston turned abruptly and looked at her. The graceful head had poised itself against the blue cloth,

her lips were parted, the eyes alight with laughter. He did not know what courage impelled him, but, crossing the room with long strides, he stooped and kissed her mouth. The next moment her arms were about his neck, and he could feel her heart beating against his own.

"Yes!" said he anon. "It would certainly be wiser to stay."

CHAPTER VIII

THE STRANGE REWARD OF DILIGENCE

THE ancient Zannuchio, stroking his long beard thoughtfully, sent up a servant to his employer's room at the White Lion Inn, to say that he must intrude upon his Excellency for a moment with business of the most urgent importance. It was the day following upon Joseph Villetard's adventure in the Piazza, and the emissary's temper, never of the best, had been soured to the last degree by the cuts and bruises he received in the dismal affray. So he welcomed the ancient one with much incivility, and positively would not hear a word of church or monument or any item of the old guide's parrot-like recital.

"What do you want with me, old man? Why do you come here?"

"To bring your Excellency most joyous news. Please let us be sure that we are quite alone."

"Have no scruples on that score, Ancient. The last fellow who listened at my keyhole was buried yesterday at St. Michell. They are beginning to understand me. Go on. What is it?"

Zannuchio peeped out upon the staircase, and

having shut the door carefully behind him and made a pretence of much secrecy, he advanced with a finger to his lips and whispered the news. It was worth a ducat to see the old man's acting and the grotesque contortions which attended his awakening greed. Oh, this Frenchman would pay a good price surely for such intelligence.

"Your friend, Excellency — your friend the Count."

"Ah, my poor friend—why do you recall my grief to me, Ancient?"

"For the best of reasons, Excellency. Your friend is alive."

Villetard swung round upon his heel, and his brows were lifted until they appeared to be climbing to the summit of his egg-shaped crown.

"My friend—alive! Old man, be careful what you are saying."

Zannuchio cracked his fingers and his eyes positively danced in his head with the success of it. Leave these foreigners to him—he would make the most of them.

"Excellency, I know very well what I am about. Your friend is not dead but alive. These old eyes have seen him. He is not even in danger, Excellency. What says the proverb? 'Two faces under one cap,' in your tongue, '*L'amour et la fumée ne peuvent se cacher.*' Understand that—I know. Body of Bacchus! I tell you I have seen him—here in Venice, in a garden. Ho, ho, in a garden, Excellency, where it was very well with him—very well indeed."

The old man's ardour was tremendous. He thrust his goat's beard forward into Villetard's face, and leering, ogling, standing now upon one foot, now upon the other, he could scarcely control himself while he blurted out his story. The Count was in Venice; he, Zannuchio, could point out the house—for a hundred ducats its door would be opened to-night. There was a pretty dish to set before a king! He stood trembling with his desire of applause; he had not measured the ingratitude of man; and how should he know that his news was just the one thing that his master would hush up at any price. Nay, it had not so much as occurred to this ancient Zannuchio; he did not understand the chilling glance which the emissary cast upon him or the sudden pallor of that sea-green face.

"You say that my friend is not dead but alive, and that you have seen him, old man. Then why did you not come to me at once? Why do you not tell me where you have seen him? Is this your diligence, this the way you reward me for my favours? Be careful now, or you will exhaust my patience. I do not like surprises, old man; my health is too delicate to permit them."

The Ancient was too eager to discern the growing anger, and far too dense to understand it. He believed merely that he had not made himself understood, and he would have begun again from the beginning if the emissary's patience had suffered him.

"I knew but an hour ago, Excellency, at the door

of San Zaccaria, built, as your Excellency may remember, by Antonio di Marco in the year——"

"*Sacrebleu* ! old man, do you wish me to flog you ?"

"God forbid, Excellency. I was saying that the valet, Otto, told me. There is no better gossip on the Riva. For the half of a ducat he would sell his own grandmother to the devil. And there you have it, Excellency, since my lady trusts him and keeps him in her house. He is our friend. When we go to him presently with a little money in our hands, hey, presto ! the door is open and my lord Count walks out. Thereafter the woman will pay us for silence. I see great possibilities in this, Excellency, both of fortune for yourself and such humble reward as you may be pleased to bestow upon me. If I have done my duty, it is my duty to do it and I will not praise myself. But you, Excellency, from you I look to hear that I have done well."

He was really very earnest, and earnestness alone blinded him to Villetard's rising anger and the action which accompanied it. Lying upon a chair in the window of the room was a shapely French riding-whip, the identical one which the Chevalier had carried upon his journey across the mainland—and now, while the old guide talked, itching fingers were trying to touch the whip and get a grasp of it.

"You have done well, old Zannuchio, exceedingly well. I am to understand, then, that my friend, the Comte de Joyeuse, is hidden in the house of this valet, Otto, whose conscience is such a drug in the market ? Is that the story ? Come, out with it !"

Zannuchio opened his eyes very wide.

"Excellency, you make a mistake. The Count is in no such place—he is at the Casa degli Spiriti—the house with the doors of bronze. Your Excellency will surely remember that."

"Yes, I think that I remember it. Are you quite sure of this, old man?"

"I will swear it on my father's grave, Excellency."

"Ha!—that is very satisfactory, Zannuchio, very satisfactory indeed!"

The mocking laugh changed in an instant and the tempest of anger suddenly broke. Catching the quaking old hypocrite by the left arm, Villetard snatched up the whip in his right hand and began to flog him soundly. So heavy were the lashes, so loud the old man's bellowing, that mine host Mareau and his satellites came to the stair's foot and would have gone up but for their fear of the terrible Frenchman. And surely Villetard had a strong right arm. Up and down the room, round and round he drove the terror-stricken guide, who fled from the lash as from a rod of burning iron; and at every blow this was the lesson:

"My friend is not alive, Zannuchio; he is dead. Will you remember that? He is dead; he was assassinated in the Riva degli Schiavoni three days ago. Have you a good memory, old man? Ha! I'll cut it into you yet! He is not at Madame's house—he is dead. The lord Count—oh, say it after me now; say it after me—he is dead; he is not in any house."

STRANGE REWARD OF DILIGENCE 99

The old man fell in a heap at last, and lifting trembling hands, he repeated the lesson—

"The lord Count is not in any house—he is dead."

A crazy gondola, rowed by a half-witted lad whom the Ancient employed, carried Zannuchio from the White Lion Inn swiftly towards the Palazzo Burano. His back was scarred and bleeding, and his flowing robe had been sadly cut and torn by the lash; but, truth to tell, his animosity against his aggressor was less vehement than it might have been. In Zannuchio's country the Turk had caused fear of and respect for the whip to become a birth-right; and this old man, so crafty, so tortuously perverse, could wholly admire a stranger whom neither trickery could deceive nor a glib tongue captivate. In some measure a master like this conferred honour upon his servant; and while the old man resolved that he would bide his time and trust to opportunity to settle their scores, he determined at the same time to hold to his present employment with both hands, for, said he, this French Chevalier is too clever a rogue to leave. Besides such news as he had to sell was not in any way depreciated by the mishap which had befallen him, and his cunning old head was not half big enough to hold the schemes which a busy brain thrust upon it. That some one would buy the tidings of him he did not doubt; and casting about for a ready market, he bethought him of Lorenzo of Brescia, and wondered that such a name should have escaped him before.

And this was the Ancient's argument.

The Marquise is my lord's kinswoman. He will be very ready to do what is right in the matter. This Frenchman may hang them both if they do not have a care. The Savi would certainly punish my lady heavily for concealing a refugee in her house—perhaps with death. She runs a double risk, for Bonaparte will be told that the young man died in her house, and the poltroons here will save their skins by delivering her up. If Lorenzo is caught in the same net, the people themselves will stone him. I have everything to gain by becoming a go-between. The young man can be dealt with ; no one need know, and old Lorenzo will cease to shake in his shoes. Yes, to the Palazzo Burano. It should be worth a thousand ducats at the worst.

The argument was good but the result indifferent. A hint of an urgent message from Madame la Marquise de St. Remy carried the Ancient at once to Lorenzo's presence ; but hardly had he set foot in the great library when whom should he espy there but my lady herself, standing by the table with a paper in her hand, and so curious to know what message she had sent herself that she received the messenger with a joyous little laugh, which made his knees quake and his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth. My lord, however, sat back in his splendid chair with the air of one whose lightest word was a jewel of eloquence, whose pen dipped diamonds even in its pauses.

"Your name is Karl Zannuchio, and you come

STRANGE REWARD OF DILIGENCE 101

from my house. Indeed, I find that very hard to believe, sir," said my lady.

"Be brief," my lord added, and ten generations of autocrats were necessary for the tone.

Now, the ancient Zannuchio was rarely taken at a disadvantage ; but here, at the Palazzo Burano, where the ceilings should have been a fortune to him and the books have inspired him to enduring flights, he was as one struck dumb, and the bridges being cut behind him, and the Marquise becoming impatient, he floundered dismally, and could but stammer like a schoolboy—

"If your Excellency pleases—if you will graciously hear me."

"We are listening, old man. What is your message ?"

"To thank your Excellency for your condescension to one so humble and to beg you——"

"Your message, old man. Did I not tell you to be brief——"

"Excellency, God forgive me, I have a wicked tongue. That which I came to say is for your ear alone."

My lady ceased to laugh, and the shadow of a frown crossed her handsome face.

"You brought a message from the Marquise de St. Remy. What is it then, old man ? Why do you not tell the truth ?"

And to Lorenzo she said—

"I would not see this man alone, my Lord."

Lorenzo bowed gravely, and sweeping a long sleeve aside with a stately gesture, he tinkled a

little bell upon the table, and summoned the valet, Noello.

"Flog this fellow and send him from the house," was his command; "he is nothing but an impostor."

They hurried the old man away, although he cried back that they would repent it, my lady chiefly, for, said he, "you know why I am come;" and when the idlers in the kitchen had tired of the play, and the Ancient amused them no longer by barking like a dog, or crawling upon all fours at their command, they drove him to the crazy gondola and there left him in a sorry state. For a full hour now he compelled the half-witted lad to row him to and fro between Rialto and the Dogana, while he racked his wits for some plan which should accomplish his vengeance and remunerate him fitly for his tidings. If, at one time, he was almost determined to go straight to the Custodi of the quarter, he remembered that the police were likely to pay little for his information; while Lorenzo's influence would certainly cause him to be wholly disbelieved in high places. In truth, even the crafty mind of such a schemer was baffled by the many perplexities and side issues which attended this chance secret, and it is even possible that he would have determined to keep it awhile in the market of circumstance had not a figure upon the steps of the Church of S. Maria della Salute changed the current of his thoughts instantly, and set them drifting toward a new house of endeavour which could hardly fail to welcome him. For the figure was that of a serving maid, and the house to which she

STRANGE REWARD OF DILIGENCE 103

was going was that of Bianca, the daughter of Francis Pesaro, the senator.

"And she will buy the tidings," the old man said ; and he snapped his fingers and cuffed the boy, and in his eagerness forgot his burning back and the play he had enacted in Lorenzo's kitchen.

Now the truth was, that certain gossips in Venice had tossed Bianca's name in the net of rumour, and their sport dealt none too lightly with it. She was a handsome, shapely girl, little liking the disabilities of her sex ; and, it is said, an abiding plague to the doting old father, who had neither the authority to compel nor the will to curb her. Reckless in some measure of a reputation for consistency, she had from the first chosen to name herself as the self-elected friend of the young hussar whom Bonaparte sent to Venice ; and while this was attended by all the inconveniences of the unpopular partnership, Bianca delighted in defying the conventions and in holding up the Comte de Joyeuse to the mirror of her own idolatry and impetuous adulation. She posed everywhere as Gaston's advocate, invited him again and again to the Palazzo Pesaro, was seen with him in public places, in the gardens, the theatre, and even at the casino—while he, with that cold assent which she claimed of her persistency, suffered her importunities for the sake of his own cause and the service which such an influential house could render it. But never for an instant had Gaston de Joyeuse been in love with her. He was as a man led hither and thither upon a seemingly profitless quest, and

yet saying to himself that every step was toward the General's goal. Even Bianca's impetuous temper did not trouble him. He told her frankly that his friendship was dangerous for her; and when she would not listen and preferred to speak of love, well, then, his evasions were of themselves a justification of Bonaparte's confidence in him.

Old Zannuchio knew as much of this intrigue as any pry who frequented the kitchens and the casinos of Venice. He knew Bianca's capacity for intrigue and the ridicule which her impotent quest of the young French officer had cast upon her; and he went to her house with the exultation of one who carried news which would both enrage and gratify her. As it chanced, Pesaro's daughter was in the very act of going to her gondola when the Ancient's boat came bumping against the riva of the palace; and such of the servants as would have driven him away were caught in the act by their sharp-eared mistress, who bade them stand aside while she heard him for himself. A master of "go-betweens," he had but to bend and whisper—"Concerning a certain stranger, Excellency," and all doors were instantly open to him, and he was ushered into the sanctuary like the herald of an embassy. Bianca, herself a tall brunette with liquid black eyes and a pasty cheek, positively trembled with expectation, and could hardly utter her words coherently. She, too, had heard that Gaston was dead; but the old man seemed to declare that the rumour was false; and who could say that the lover, who would not love,

STRANGE REWARD OF DILIGENCE 105

might not be waiting for her upon Terra Firma after all.

"You come from Monsieur de Joyeuse, old man—is that what you would say?"

The old rogue made her a profound bow.

"I come upon such an errand, Excellency, that I am already sure of my reward."

"Do not be sure at all—you see that I am going out. I shall reward your brevity."

"I was fully aware of it when I entered the house. There are many, I said, who would pay a good price for that which I have to sell—but to my Lady Bianca it will be most precious. Excellency, such was my argument."

Bianca began to tap the parquet with her little foot, while her eyes blazed with impatience and anger.

"Oh, what a dreadful old man!" she cried, in spite of herself.

"Who, nevertheless, is here to tell you that Monsieur de Joyeuse is alive and well and as happy, Excellency, as may be apart from your adorable presence."

The girl listened with such a show of indifference as she could muster, although her flushed cheek and her breaking voice declared the pleasure with which she heard him.

"The Count alive—then you come from Terra Firma?"

"No, Excellency, I come from prison."

"From prison?"

"Yes, from a prison which may nevertheless be opened—for a thousand ducats."

"I will pay it when you bring him here."

Zannuchio's face lengthened until it resembled the mask of old Pantalone then capering upon the Piazzetta.

"But, Signorina, without a thousand ducats I am no more able to open the doors of the Casa degli Spiriti——"

It was an odd slip for such a graduate in the art of profitable chicanery, and the old man cursed it to his dying day. "But for my accident in spilling the name of the house from my pot," he would tell his friends in the coffee shops, "I should now be worth a thousand golden ducats." His friends laughed at him and called him bungler; a name, in truth, he richly deserved. No sooner had Bianca heard the words "Casa degli Spiriti" than the whole story of Gaston's disappearance from Venice wrote itself upon the tablets of her imagination. Her friend, then, owed his safety to Beatrice, Marquise de St. Remy; she, Bianca, was not the only one moved to compassion by the young man's danger. And being but a woman, Pesaro's daughter suffered in those minutes all the pangs which baffled love and passionate jealousy could inflict upon a nature abandoned to self-will. She could have torn Beatrice limb from limb, and satisfied her conscience afterwards that it was a virtuous action.

"Signore," she exclaimed with a calm which set old Zannuchio shaking in his shoes, "if what you tell me is true, your tidings, I think, had better go to the Chief of the Ward. This is evidently an affair for the police."

STRANGE REWARD OF DILIGENCE 107

She would have swept him aside, but he caught the sleeve of her gown and implored her to hear him. His dream of ducats vanished before his eyes ; he would have been content now with a handful of silver.

"True, Excellency, it is a matter for the police, and yet the police will not help our friend. If his safety be anything to you——"

"To me, old man—what are you saying then ?"

The Ancient whispered the words as though he were the minister of a sublime tragedy.

"That if the door of the Casa degli Spiriti be opened, both the man and the woman will suffer, Excellency."

Bianca clapped her pretty hands.

"Nothing could be better," she cried—"positively nothing."

And so Zannuchio got precisely that amount, and Bianca went off laughing to her gondola, while to herself she said, "Both the man and the woman will suffer ; could anything be better ?"

CHAPTER IX

THE YOUNG MAN BERNADINE

GASTON DE JOYEUSE had been seven days at the Casa degli Spiriti when a whisper went abroad through the *salons* and *cafés* of Venice that a new dispatch had been received from General Bonaparte, in such terms that the Savi del Consiglio, the fools among the foolish as the wits called them, were utterly at a loss to answer it. Contemptuous in manner, in a style entirely foreign to the canons of diplomacy, this amazing document did not scruple to apply the epithet "poltroon" to the Doge himself ; while lesser men were abused with a fishwife's tongue and so ignominiously flouted that one breath of the old Republican spirit would have compelled even the meanest State to answer the writer in the only way consistent with the nation's honour. The hour had long since passed, however, when Venice cared anything for her own honour or that of her senators. For a few days the thing was discussed in all the *casinos* and made the gossip of every *campo*. A few poor troops, clad

in rags and indifferent to any issue of any campaign which was not concerned with the quest of wine and bread, came over from Dalmatia and the Islands, and were paraded upon the Piazzis to the delight of the clowns and the derision of the idlers. The rattle of drums and the blare of trumpets awakened for a brief moment the sleeping sentinel of a nation's existence; but he rolled upon his side again when the cavalcade swept by, and the lion of St. Mark became but a pillow for his head. The French might burn the last house upon Terra Firma, pluck the last grain of wheat, throw the last chalice into the crucible, carry the last woman to Paris—but they would never cross the lagoons and assault this city of the centuries. At least, this was the argument, which seemed to rely upon the hypothesis that what has not been will not be, and, therefore, is impossible. Venice delighted in reasoning such as this. Her sensitive nerves were soothed thereby; she continued to eat and drink, and she had not ceased to be merry.

Now, the theme of Bonaparte's angry dispatch was the hypothetical murder of his friend and *aide-de-camp*, Gaston de Joyeuse. With this he charged Senate and people, and to all their protestations of ignorance and innocence he replied in a tone so uncompromising that any but a moribund nation would have read his ultimate purpose, and either contested it to the last point, or called upon the surest resources of diplomacy to save the State from its folly. Writing from Gratz, in the General's name, l'Allemant, the Commander of the Division

of the South, thus addressed the Doge and his Councillors :—

“Most Serene Prince ; Most Excellent Signors : The Minister of the French Republic has not ceased to place before the eyes of your Serene Highness, and of your Excellencies, all the crimes of which the Venetian Republic have rendered themselves guilty toward the French. The Government, to prove that they have no share in these crimes, ought to have put an end to them. This has not been done. They have increased from day to day. The blood of Frenchmen has been spilt ; it has been spilt under your own eyes. It calls for vengeance and shall have it. I demand it in the name of the French people. It is the order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Italy that it fall, not on the miserable instruments of the atrocities of the inquisitors of State, but on the inquisitors themselves ; not on the obscure satellites of the army, but on the senator himself who commanded the assassination of citizen Joyeuse, of him and his abettors—and that they be instantly arrested and brought to justice. Your Serene Highness and your Excellencies will take care that your answer be delivered to the Minister of the French Republic within forty-eight hours, and to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Italy at Mantua within ninety-six hours from the date thereof.

(Signed) “L’ALLEMANT.”

And so behold a parlous case—that the city should

punish those who had been guilty of this crime—not the mere bravos who had leaped at the bait of ducats, but those who had prompted the murder and abetted it. For, in truth, a Senate which had so often expressed the desire to see the last of the Count of Joyeuse, was in no great doubt about his fate. It believed that he had been murdered, and that nothing short of a miracle could restore him to life again. No longer could the densest optimism deny the sincerity of Bonaparte or the intention which lay behind his threats. An eye for an eye, and for an aide-de-camp, a senator. The truth was plain enough, though the facts were stupefying. There had been talk enough in the months gone by of death and glory and the great sons gone before—but these men, waxing fat in vice and indolence, looked at one another askance when the bolt was shot, and asked vainly, Who will hang that this Frenchman may be satisfied? There was no answer to that—not a single word.

Ninety-six hours—and of these twelve passed in mute dismay, and twelve in goings to and fro of pale-faced inquisitors, and twelve in gatherings upon the Piazza, and as many more in the swift reviewing of tattered troops from Slavonia, from the mainland, and any quarter whence they could be got.

And so to the ninetieth hour—and then a great revulsion and the truth.

Gaston, Count de Joyeuse, was not dead but alive. And a woman held him a prisoner. Laughter held both his sides when Venice determined to deliver up both the man and the woman to Bonaparte.

At the twelfth hour of the panic, a swift gondola carried my Lady Beatrice from the Palazzo Burano to her own house by the church of San Zaccaria. She went with heavy thoughts, and her eyes were indifferent to the changing spectacle both upon the shore and the waters. It was nothing to her that the near lagoon was black with the hurrying boats, or that the steps of the Ducal Palace could hardly give foothold to the crowd of senators, tongue-tied by prisoned eloquence. She was all for the house of the secret, which now must be a secret no longer—for the prisoner whom the prison must so soon deliver to freedom and his friends. For she recognised that she could serve Gaston no more. And yet in her heart she told herself that she would cling to him as to the one figure who had taught her that she was as other women, born for love and marriage and not for empty honours of palace or *salon*. She knew that she had learned to love a man at last. And he would leave her to-day—the day of farewell; it might be the day of that vindictive punishment which discovery could not fail to inflict upon her.

It had been a strange association, that of this beautiful woman and the young soldier whose passionate love she had awakened so readily—intimate and yet innocent, declared but once and that upon the first day in a human transport beyond control; hushed and hidden since as a woman hushes a baby and will not stoop to kiss it—peeping rather at the face and saying, "It is there." Rarely now did Beatrice intrude upon Gaston's privacy. She was afraid for herself and for him. She did not

dare to face him lest a word, a look, a gesture should rob her of the right to serve her country and his in that great work her patriotism had thrust upon her. She suffered Gaston's kiss that she might keep him in her house—but afterwards she became the cold mistress of intrigue, the woman of brains who will let nothing change her purpose.

But to-day there was need of restraint no more. The door of the cage stood open ; the bird would fly, she knew not whither.

She had determined to speak with Gaston directly she arrived at her own house ; and she went straight from her gondola to the little garden and the fountain of the broken faun ; and there she found him sitting before a table, with brushes and colours at his side, and upon the canvas such a crude portrait of herself that he joined his laugh to hers and admitted it was a failure.

"It is not my *métier*," he said, throwing the brushes from him and spurning the picture with an angry hand. "I am a soldier—nothing will change me. We are born with one gift, most of us, Beatrice, and we spend our time quarrelling with that. Well, I am no different from the rest. I cannot draw, but I can imagine. And the real Beatrice is here in my mind, where she will remain always. Please give me the canvas . . . you cannot value it—you do not blind me to its defects."

"I value it because of them," she rejoined, holding it in ivory-white fingers and regarding it as one kindly critical. "And I shall keep the

picture, Monsieur Gaston. Why not—since there is nothing else to keep ? ”

My lady's eyes were very eloquent, and spared her many an unpleasant confession. Gaston read a clear story there, but not the story he would have read. “It is finished between us. This is the day,” said the eyes—and they provoked his curiosity beyond the ordinary.

“What is it, Beatrice—what have you come here to tell me ? ” he asked, turning away from triviality to the truth they must face together. And she answered as briefly—

“Many things—some that you have already told yourself. Let us walk, Gaston ; I shiver with the cold.”

She put the canvas down upon the table, and, touching his arm with the tips of her fingers, she began to pace the little garden with him, slowly, as one meditating. Though the sun shone down from a changing sky the day was raw and damp, and even the stones oozed wet and slime upon their path. Gaston had cast off his hussar's uniform on the second day of that which he called the captivity ; and dressed soberly in a suit of dark blue cloth, with ruffles of fine lace at his wrists and throat, and a three-cornered hat beneath his arm, he might have stepped straight from some modern canvas into this old-fashioned garden, remote and unobserved. And these two together trod the crumbling path in silence, each fearing to ask a question of the other, both knowing that a question must be asked. Beatrice was the first to speak after all.

"This captive of captivity has he learned nothing to-day?"

"Nothing but the generosity of his jailor, and new words of gratitude towards her."

"There has been no message—no whisper, no voice that has said to him, 'This is the day of farewell'?"

"Why do you ask me that, Beatrice? Have I wished for such a voice?"

"Our wishes are nothing. Destiny does not put them in the balance. Listen again, Monsieur Gaston, and tell me what the day says."

She stood with hand upraised and bade him listen. Far off like the surge of a human sea beating upon the great shore of the Piazzetta and the Ducal Palace, there rose up a voice of a frightened people, frenzied in threat and impotent defiance. Venice thus answered Bonaparte with filthy epithet and coarse abuse. The Count's name was to be heard too—mocked by those who believed him to be dead. Gaston heard little beyond the echo of uproar, and he quite failed to understand the meaning of it.

"There has been a new move, then," he said reflectively; "we advance upon Verona and your people are afraid. I told you it would be that, Beatrice."

She led him on again, taking the words out of his mouth.

"The Senate is afraid, yes, but not for Verona. It is afraid for a man, and he is dead."

"You do not mean Villetard?"

"I mean Gaston, Count de Joyeuse."

Gaston laughed loudly that such a thing should be.

"They mourn me," he rejoined. "Well, that is something. I shall have to show myself presently."

"I came to tell you so. Yes, you will have to show yourself—to save Venice, Monsieur Gaston, to save my people."

He did not understand her; for, in truth, the deeper phases of this intrigue had been entirely hidden from him, and, but for Villetard's warning, that he would do well to play captivity (which he construed to mean that he would do well to keep Madame out of mischief), he had no notion that anything but friendship lay beyond the adventure.

"How shall I save your people, Beatrice? Are you going to make kings of the pawns, then? Who am I to have any voice in it at all?"

"You are the man about whom Bonaparte writes to us to-day."

"I—impossible."

"In no way. The General asks for you, or those who are responsible for your safety."

He laughed at the idea of it, delighted in his young way that he should be accounted worthy to be named by such as Bonaparte.

"Let them deliver the wicked ones up," he exclaimed, "we will go to the General together, my Lady."

She flinched from the jest. How little he understood that she might lose all—honour, liberty, even life for his sake that day.

"Yes," she said, "your master asks for the wicked ones, Monsieur Gaston; he asks with menaces. This house is necessary to you no longer. Go, if you will—or, let me say, go, because it is your duty to yourself and to us. I, at least, am prepared——"

Her head was turned away, but her voice was breaking. The woman in her wrestled bitterly with faith and necessity. And Gaston understood then, for the first time.

"Good God!" he cried, "do they charge you with my death?"

"They charge me with nothing—nothing is known. We have some hours yet—if your friend Villetard is pleased to grant them."

"Then Villetard is the man?"

"Yes, it is his hand. Oh, my dear Gaston, what a bungler a woman can be when she desires to serve both herself and her country. Do you not see that we must pay a double price for you now?"

She feigned a merriment, better to be heard, and, closing her hand about his arm, set out once more to pace the dreary garden. The unspoken thought was very sweet to them both—on her part that she had done her duty to her country and to him; on his the sure knowledge that she had risked all in one supreme endeavour. For an instant the lover within him struggled hard with the soldier. What right had he and she to play any other part in this fretting world of strife and intrigue than that which their own affections dictated? What held them back from some refuge on the mainland where they

might live out their lives as their own hearts dictated? The soldier within him said, "Duty. Fidelity to a great master. Love for Bonaparte. These keep you back." His passionate impulses were always curbed by the word "Bonaparte." Love and marriage would come afterwards with peace and the millennium. He tried to speak of it all as of a debtor and creditor account between good friends.

"At least you shall not suffer, Beatrice," he said with swift determination. "Of course, we have made a great mistake. I was weak to be persuaded, and you were too generous to persuade me. It is all done with. I must leave your house at once and tell the truth—the least debt I can pay you. Some day, perhaps, I may do something which shall really prove my gratitude, but here and now I am reduced to that poor word, 'thanks.' Let me repeat it again and again. A man's thanks—a soldier's thanks. The secret is our own—none will share it, not even Villetard. I can find a story and the rest will be easy. Nothing short of that is to be thought of. I must go now."

She did not release her touch of his arm, nor would she look at him while he spoke.

"I understand you," she said, "I have no longer anything to say, but I do not blame myself, Monsieur Gaston. You are wise to go, but you were wise to come. Some day, who knows, I shall pluck another white rose and drop it at your feet; but Venice will be no more then. She is passing, as this sunshine; but, unlike it, she will not return. Is it not an

eternal truth, that a people's star sets once and for ever? And ours goes down in laughter and to the music of fools' bells. We have no men left, and the women are bunglers, as you see. Yes, yes, Monsieur Gaston, my rose must grow in France—I know it. Perhaps when I think of what might have been and what is, I do not regret it."

She snatched her hand from him now and stood back, for her breaking voice stirred all his manhood, and he would have caught her in his arms and protested that he would find the rose wherever its leaves fell, and take it to his heart and say, "It is mine for ever"; but in this she forbade him, not by any word, but by that strange and pathetic dignity which her love of Venice could evoke to shield her from the common penalties of her womanhood. Then for a little while, perhaps, Gaston remembered her great position in the city. It may be that he remembered also the foul slanders which malice had put upon her, and nothing but acquaintance had denied. Impossible to conceive how few days had passed since men had told him that she was the authoress of so many crimes against his own countrymen; and yet there was a trait in her character which even Gaston could not master. She was not wholly woman, he said, or she would have given herself to him then and there, for he knew that she loved him.

"I will not believe that all is lost for Venice," he said compassionately, and not a little moved by her distress. "It is difficult to speak of it, Beatrice; but if your people are wise, they may yet save the

city. As for my share in your misfortunes, that is to be speedily settled. I shall go to the 'White Lion' now and say nothing. I am the truth, the dead come to life. Very well, the others may explain——"

"That you left the Casa degli Spiriti at twelve o'clock. Oh, my dear Monsieur Gaston, do you suppose that any one can leave this house when the sun is shining and his name remain unknown?"

He thought of it in some little perplexity.

"Then I shall go at sunset."

"To the man who will say, 'You come from Madame la Marquise?'"

"How should Villetard know that."

"Ask yourself if such a man does not know."

He flushed deeply. Had he not received a message from the Chevalier on the morning of his arrival? Like a flash it came to him that the crafty Villetard was at the bottom of this treachery. Who had written to Bonaparte if not he? And together they brought this peril on a woman who would save the honour of her country and the life of a friend. Impossible, then, to go to the "White Lion," . . . and if not there, to what haven?

"That wise head is right, as always," he admitted reluctantly. "Villetard would know. It is not to be thought of, Beatrice. We must find an alternative."

"The alternative is waiting now," she retorted with a little gladness of triumph—"here is my servant come to announce him."

A lacquey crossed the garden as she spoke, and, hesitating to approach them, he waited in an attitude

of meek solicitation by the fountain. When Beatrice addressed him, he said—

"The Lord of Brescia, Excellency, is in the *salon*."

"The Lord of Brescia!" exclaimed Gaston. "There is the greatest rogue in Venice."

"And my kinsman. I like your compliment, Monsieur Gaston."

"Forgive me. I had forgotten it. But there are other things I cannot forget."

"Do not remember them to day. We have need of our friends."

"Our friends?"

"Yes, of those who will help us to open the door."

She spoke in a low voice, and, drawing him aside, she said—

"The way lies to Gratz to Bonaparte's camp. This man will write your passport."

"I will believe it when I see it."

"He will give it you himself—come."

Pose was a necessary habit of life to Lorenzo of Brescia, and his attitude abroad were scarcely less diverting than his attitudes at home. Rarely did he permit them to add a *felze* or cabin to his gondola—for he held that it was his duty, like a greater upon a greater occasion, to show himself to the people. Ask any of the *zanni* upon the Piazzetta, and they would play Lorenzo to the life for you—the attitude, the air, the monstrous gravity, and the dismal voice. In Beatrice's *salon* this fine impostor

was very much at home. A great gilt chair served for his throne—they carried him a footstool for his feet ; the size of the apartment capped the measure of his self-importance—he could strike an attitude as a chord is struck upon an instrument, surely and by practice. And in this employment the Marquise found him when she returned from the garden. She was alone then, for the Count had gone upstairs to the musician's gallery, whence he could hear every word that was spoken. He did not believe her story for a moment. Impossible that this old man, who so hated the French, would help one of them out of the city. Moreover, my lady was bound, tongue and argument, for by what courage would she dare to tell him that he, Gaston, was in the house? Impossible, he said again.

Beatrice entered the vast *salon* as one impatient to welcome a guest, and, advancing with arms outstretched, she offered both her hands to Lorenzo, who kissed them condescendingly and with unction. The conversation, beginning ecstatically with "My dear Lord," "Ah, my dear Marquise," settled down anon to a low buzz of talk which tantalised Gaston and almost drove him to an imprudence. Presently, however, my lady stood a little apart from her guest, and, the lacqueys having withdrawn, she intimated that they might speak freely.

"You are come from the Palace, Lorenzo?" was her question.

"Straight to this door, my child, as a good oar could bring me," he answered her.

"Then I must hear your news first."

"It is little enough. I spoke for a full hour to no purpose. Answer this Frenchman as he writes, I said—that those who harass this peaceful Republic be delivered up to be punished by her. They heard me with some impatience—yes, I fear it was with impatience. The temper of the people is greatly changed, my child. They no longer recognise me in public places. I might be a nonentity."

"Oh, my dear Lord!"

"I say it and I mean it. There were ten thousand upon the Piazza and I was not recognised. Not so much as a cap went up—not a single cap."

"A shocking evidence of thrift, Lorenzo—something new in our story. Tell me that you shook the dust off your feet."

"I was concerned rather with the misfortunes of my country, which touch me deeply—very deeply, Beatrice. When its wise men go unheard, a State is desperately pressed. You will admit that."

"Oh surely—and yet——"

She paused, standing by an ivory table and turning the leaves of a portfolio there.

"And yet, Beatrice——"

"I was thinking, Lorenzo, that if the people are deaf, it may sometimes be the wise man's fault."

"Ah! Then I am not to be that man, who alone amongst men has convinced a woman against her will."

"It is not a question of will, but of judgment, Lorenzo. You must answer Bonaparte, must you not?"

"With defiance—in eighty hours."

"Defiance, my Lord, is often the protest of impotence."

"I do not admit it—it is sometimes very different, a virtue, a kind of courage to which only great minds will stoop."

"Then you are prepared to stoop, I see."

"You choose to misrepresent me. I tell you that I am become nothing, nobody, a mere cipher. I no longer am considered in their reckoning."

"My poor Lord! And you consent to all this?"

"How can I refuse consent when my opinion is not wanted?"

"By compelling them to hear you, Lorenzo."

My lady had a way of saying things which carried more than phrase or argument—a hint of resource impossible to mistake and pleasing in its confidence. As she stood there by the table turning the sheets of white paper which littered it, and allowing her fingers to play with a grey goose-quill, Lorenzo said to himself that he was losing time, and he knew that he would be wise to hear her.

"Compulsion is good for man, but not for nations," he exclaimed with unusual prescience.

"Shall I take Venice by the shoulders, Beatrice?"

"Yes, my Lord," she retorted quietly, "you will take Venice by the shoulders."

"And drive her to Bonaparte's feet?"

"To his feet if you will—but laughing as she goes, Lorenzo."

"Ha! an enigma. Read me this riddle aright."

She drew a chair to the table and dipped the pen

in a jewelled inkstand. Gaston in the gallery above knelt that he might hear her more distinctly. Lorenzo of Brescia leaned forward in his chair in the attitude of a new Augustus delivering judgment.

"I will read you the riddle ; yet, God knows if it is to be read aright, my Lord. And first of Bonaparte—what does he ask of you ?"

"To bring the dead to life—him or his assassins."

"And your answer ?"

"That we are neither prophets to work a miracle nor priests to pray for one."

"This message has been delivered, Lorenzo ?"

"It goes to the mainland to-night—thence at a rider's best speed to Gratz."

"I beg you delay it, my Lord—it is a madman's message."

Lorenzo was about to avow that it had been written at his dictation, but foreseeing what that would imply, he checked himself and said nothing. Beatrice, in her turn, flushed a little, and would not look at him. She played for great stakes—so great that her hand trembled as it touched the pen.

"It is a madman's message," she repeated ; "if there were one wise man in Venice, he would rise up to deny it. So says my judgment, Lorenzo. You ask for a prophet to work a miracle, and I will find you one—here in this room, at my side."

Lorenzo half turned his head, believing that she would call some one to her aid ; but perceiving only his own figure in one of the mirrors, he jumped to her meaning and was pleased.

"I am the man you think of, then ?"

"You are the man, my Lord."

"To bring the dead to life?"

"Not so—to prove that he is living."

"Make yourself clearer, Beatrice—I listen, but scarcely follow."

"Then I will find a child's argument. Gaston de Joyeuse is dead—you are convinced of that?"

"I fear it is too true."

"And yet if Gaston de Joyeuse were to leave this house with a passport signed by you, my Lord, would that be no answer to Bonaparte?"

He heard her with gasping amazement. Even yet something was hidden from him.

"But Gaston de Joyeuse is dead," he stammered.

"We will bring him to life, Lorenzo. Hear me. There is in my service a young Frenchman by name Bernadine, who greatly resembles the dead Count. He is obedient, discreet, faithful. With a pass from you in his hand he could reach the mainland to-night—a copy of that pass goes by our messenger to Bonaparte's camp. The guard at Maestre will be our witnesses. We shall declare at the palace that we have had our own reasons for saving this man's life. Upon you the charge must fall—for I am a woman and it would put me to shame. But it will bring you honour—and those who would have cried upon you a week ago because of it will kiss your feet to-day. That is my miracle, Lorenzo."

She broke off in a little nervous laugh which betrayed her agitation; but Lorenzo sat for many minutes, open-mouthed and staring. When, at last, he comprehended, and the boldness of her plot was



The beguiling of Lorenzo

realised, he stood up, and, forgetful of any attitude, he covered her hand with kisses.

"I will save my country," he said. "Let me see your Frenchman."

"The paper first," she cried; "the pass to Gratz, my Lord."

He signed it, trembling with excitement.

"I will crush them—with this," he said pompously. "Let me see the lad, let me press upon him the nature of his duty, and the reward I will pay when it is done."

"He needs no reward," she said.

"Pah; there was never a man born yet who did not need a reward."

They summoned Gaston from the gallery—and the old man, who had seen him before but twice in his life, and then in a hussar's uniform, and was no more able to name him for the true Count than to pick a particular pebble from the seashore, greeted him with great cordiality and effusive condescension.

"You are desirous of doing a great service to Madame la Marquise, sir?"

"Most desirous, my Lord," said Gaston, whose astonishment was the good ally of discretion. He did not believe, even then, that imbecility could wear so pleasant a face.

"You will take this pass to Gratz; and then make the best of your way to Florence, young man. Understand, it is for Madame's sake."

"I so understand it, my Lord."

"She counts upon your fidelity—I upon your

gratitude, for I am about to give you a hundred ducats."

"I will take nothing ; it is enough to serve Madame."

"Nevertheless, you will find the money in your purse—these are not the days when a staff in the hand is enough. I count wholly upon your devotion in a cause which will help both nations and save your mistress much injustice."

"You will not count in vain, my Lord."

"Then lose no time. I look for news of you at Maestre by sunrise."

"I promise you the news shall be true."

He bowed and withdrew. Lorenzo, scarce able to contain himself for the success of it all, re-entered his gondola and was rowed swiftly to the Ducal Palace.

"They shall kiss my feet," he said to himself. "I will flog them with scorpions."

Vanity did not tell him the price he must ultimately pay for the scorpion which so delighted him.

CHAPTER X

TWO WHITE LAMPS

GASTON had made all his preparations for quitting the Casa degli Spiriti before the hour of supper ; and while he contemplated with no unnatural pleasure a return to his old habits of life and their associates, nevertheless a sense of responsibility for that which had happened in the house continued to trouble him, and he delayed as much as possible the moment of farewell which could not be unattended by very real regret. An opportunist, as every soldier is, is rarely permitted the page of yesterday to rob his thoughts of to-morrow ; and if his habitual indifference were not to be put off at will, at the same time he knew that his relations with Beatrice de St. Remy were different from any experience he had yet lived through, and that neither new scenes nor new activities could blot the lines which their friendship dictated. Nor was this to be set down wholly to that influence of sex which such a man as Gaston de Joyeuse had often acknowledged. He knew that it was a dominion of the mind to which he submitted—the will of an exceed-

ingly beautiful woman who had devoted her great intellect to befriend him in Venice. So much of vanity as he permitted himself to be the salt of his confidence, made him aware that Beatrice loved him and would follow him did he but lift a finger to beckon her. But against that final surrender his own ambition rebelled—reminding him how greatly Bonaparte had trusted him, and what were his obligations to the French Republic. And after all, said Prudence, Venice will fall before many weeks are passed, and you will return, and, who knows but that you will be able to repay this service a hundredfold.

It might be. The logic at least was pretty. And yet logic is the poorest friend of the man who will concede everything to a woman, but the fact that he loves her. Gaston's love for Beatrice compelled him unwittingly to linger in the room whither her love had carried him, to touch again those objects which her hands had touched, to recall the lightest of her words. He was leaving the house for ever, and at a moment when he should have discovered that every stone was dear to him. The garden wherein he had walked with her, the fountain more precious because it was broken, the bush whereon her roses grew, the silent palace, whose music was her footstep—were these nothing to him, that he should not regret them, or delay his journey one hour because of the memories they were powerful to awaken? And to this duty answered "Go"; while another voice, nameless, and but a whisper, cried—"She loves you, my lady of the garden. By

love you came in, and by love you shall go out." Gaston denied the whisper, but it followed him nevertheless like the echo of some sad song, and he lingered in the rooms that he might hear it.

How clever she was. How easily she had led that old blockhead Lorenzo into a *cul-de-sac* when she set her mind upon it. Listening to her in the gallery, Gaston had made allowances for the old lord's weakness and concession—for, surely, her voice could charm as no other, and few men, in her presence, would have had the courage of the "No." For that matter, Gaston was not sure that he had cut a finer figure than Lorenzo—for had he not played the *rôle* she assigned him, meekly and without a single protest. He was her young man, Bernadine, the faithful fellow, devoted to her. And was that true?—yes, he believed that it was. No man could enjoy the confidence of Beatrice of Venice and remain without devotion. At a later hour, Gaston would willingly have sacrificed every other interest in life had they permitted him to play the faithful fellow's part again. But it was too late then. A lover's opportunity rarely touches its zenith for the second time.

He supped with my lady in a little cabinet off the great hall, and supper being done and the servants dismissed, the young man, Giovanni, came to tell them that the gondola was at the steps of the *riva* and all prepared for the voyage to the mainland. As by common consent, they had deferred any recognition of the inevitable as long as might be; and now in the brief moments but few of their thoughts

were spoken, and these at hazard, because of their need. Beatrice herself, magnificently gowned in white velvet with roses in her splendid hair and a single chain of rubies about her neck, feigned her gayest mood when at the table, and in anecdote of Paris and of her life when she was the child-wife of the Marquis de St. Remy, she seemed to recall a girlhood which she had never lost—or losing could retake if she would but stretch out her hand. And to this mood Gaston owed not a little, since it cast so light a burden of obligation upon him. Perchance he was afraid that he would speak all his heart, the nearness of farewell, the remembrance that twenty hours would carry him to his comrades, his coming visit to Bonaparte's camp, were agents of procrastination he could not resist. It did not need so fine an intellect as that of Beatrice de St. Remy to understand how it went with him.

"At least permit me a little envy," she said. "Two hours will put you on the road to Padua. And you are honest enough to be glad, Monsieur Gaston. Well, it is something to be honest."

They were alone then and he crossed the room and put his hand very gently upon hers, looking down at her with proud eyes.

"I am not honest," he said. "I do not mention half the things which are troubling my mind. I want to ask you so much, to tell you so much—and now——"

"The gondola is at the steps," she rejoined laughingly.

"I know it, Beatrice—somehow for me it has

been there all day, saying 'Ready, ready,' and I have tried not to see it and to think that it would be better if it never came. You cannot understand that—you would not believe me if I confessed that I am tormented by my own doubts. I ought to go, I like to go, and yet I wish to stay. If you were in my place, that clear head of yours would never be plagued in this way. You would have made up your mind and the rest would be in consequence—a man and a boat, an object and a journey. Your affections and interests would not count at all. That is your character. Mine is so different. I cannot hold the balance properly between duty and inclination. But I am trying to—and your kindness will understand me."

Beatrice closed her hand about his, and for an instant heavy lids drooped upon the black eyes and hid their light from him.

"My kindness is nothing; and are you sure—quite sure—Monsieur Gaston?"

"Of what, Beatrice?"

"Of my affections and interests."

"I try to be. Beatrice, at least I think that I have some share in them. When I return to Venice——"

"Must you speak of that, Monsieur Gaston?"

"Indeed, yes; may not it be possible that my return will permit me to show how deeply grateful I am to you. Nothing now can alter the fact that you are the truest friend I have ever known. There will not be a day when I shall not think first of you and last of you—with the sun and the

night—as of a sweet affection which neither night nor day may change. Yes, I want to say that—I love you, Beatrice. I have never loved a woman in my life before. But you are different from any woman I have ever known; you compel me to say that which I would have delayed, but I cannot be silent.”

He had not meant to speak, as he said, but her presence and a certain mute pathos of her attitude compelled him, and he began to address her almost incoherently in a passionate protest, which she suffered for a little while with averted face and flushed cheeks.

“No,” she said at last in a broken whisper, “I do not forbid you, Monsieur Gaston. If you love, help me; leave Venice to-night, go to Bonaparte; remember a city and a people dear to me. Gaston, your honour asks this.”

“I will go,” he said; “my honour shall answer for me.”

She turned a radiant face to him, and he stooped and kissed her lips, and in her submission he seemed to reach the whole truth—that her love for him was no less than her love for the city she served so faithfully. When the young man Giovanni returned, he reminded them that the half of an hour had passed, he discovered them still hand in hand, as those that have forgotten time and passed all else but the hour of their own confession. But they were sadly ashamed of it, and Gaston hurried now.

“Fly—like a bird flies,” he said.

"God guard you, my friend," was her farewell.

The night was one of soft breezes and a great gold-red moon to give a shimmering wave a yellow iridescence to the sparkling waters. Late as the hour was, the lamps were still alight in the *casino*; and as the gondola passed between the cliff-like walls of the old houses which stood between the Casa degli Scritti and the northern lagoon, Gaston would, ever and anon, espy one of those cavern-like apertures whence came an aureole of light and an apparition of heaped-up tables and merry fiddlers and all the careless life of a city grown *blasé* even in pleasure. Other gondolas too went fleeting by, like phantoms of the shadows; and the lighted windows of the palaces were the radiant eyes of the dead witnesses to a greater age. Gaston thought that Venice was like some drunkard gambling the years for a brief hour of mad intoxication. To-night she would fool herself with the tippler's dream—but to-morrow she must never to rise again in the robe she once had worn. His promise to Beatrice appeared to be so poor a thing at such a time. What would it avail him? Bonaparte were he alive or dead? How should one man count in the master game the General played for the conquest of Italy—and, after Italy, of the world? Gaston could laugh almost that he must go on such a puny errand—nevertheless, to go he was determined, straight as an arrow, as his honour bade him. He would tell the truth—and afterwards, who could say, return, perhaps, at the

head of those who would trample out the last spark of this smouldering resistance.

Yes, that would be a great part to play. Lying at his ease upon the cushions of the gondola, looking up to the starry sky, he imagined Beatrice dependent upon his pity and his protection. How gentle he would be with her. How sweetly she would thank him. He would save her house from those fine gentlemen, the troopers of the new equality, and, having saved it, might even become the master of it. And herein was to be discovered the soldier's temperament, since the passionate protests he had uttered but half an hour ago in her house did not now ring with the same earnestness of conviction—and although he conserved a great tenderness towards her, his liberty and the action which it demanded were pleasantly contrasted with the many silent hours he had spent in the Casa degli Spiriti. Yes, the hours before him would be busy ones indeed—bringing the good horse and the mountain road, the blare of trumpets and the rolling of drums. Moreover, he could stand before the General again—hear his voice and delight to serve him. Gaston was, in imagination, just entering Bonaparte's tent when the young man Giovanni asked him an earnest question.

"Is your Excellency aware that we are followed?"

"Followed—the devil! What do you mean, Messer Galla?"

"That we have been followed from the bridge of San Francesco by a gondola with two white lamps and a red one."

Gaston put his head out of the cabin window and at once ascertained the truth of this.

"Do you recognise the boat, young man?"

"Impossible, Excellency; there are a thousand such boats in Venice."

"It is not from your own house, then?"

"I know that it is not; our lanterns are green above white, Excellency."

"And the police boat?"

"Without any lantern at all, Excellency, on such an errand."

Gaston laughed and settled himself comfortably upon his cushions. They had come out upon the open lagoon by this time, and the lights upon the distant islands were like clusters of stars above a golden lake. Gondolas moved upon the silvery rivers, so many ships of the night in ghostly array; but the sense of solitude was supreme, and even the splash of an oar lingered upon the still air. Far away to the northward the mountains shimmered in the moonlight, and other stars spoke of Maestre and the mainland. It was a lonely waste; just the very place for mischief, Gaston said. And he was unarmed—his sword and uniform were so much baggage in the well by the prow.

"What do you make of it, Giovanni?" he asked presently; "why should any one follow me?"

"I am quite unable to say, Excellency, if you can imagine no reason."

"I can imagine none. Clearly, Giovanni, I am not worth robbing."

"Your Excellency should not say so. There are

those in Venice who would rob the widow of her mite. But I do not think it is robbery, Excellency. Messer, the *bravo* does not work upon the water. No doubt your Excellency has enemies."

"No doubt of it, Giovanni—at least I hope so. Life would be a very poor place without enemies. Be good enough to undo my bundle and give me my sword. I am a little out of practice, but this should be something new. You are armed yourself, I perceive."

"The poniard, Excellency. . . I would sooner go without my shirt."

Gaston laughed, and, taking the sword from the servant's hand, he unsheathed it and sighed when he perceived that it was spotted with rust. The race between the two gondolas had now become exciting, and the gondoliers uttered loud cries, accompanied by a salvo of coarse oaths and blasphemies common to their trade, but dreadful to hear. These, however, stimulated them to fine efforts reminiscent of carnival and their own regattas; and the two boats plunged onward gracefully, now lifting their prows, now dipping them to the dancing swell. So exhilarating was it, so bravely done, that Gaston found himself indifferent to any issue but that of the race, and he watched the dancing lanterns behind him with the eye of one pursued who measures the strength of his pursuer. Afterwards he wondered why they had raced at all—but the young man Giovanni appeared to know, and his stern commands to the *barcerolo* behind him were

those of one who decides a momentous issue. And so successful were they that for a while the distance between the two boats was unchanged, though the boatmen's tongues did not cease to bid each other defiance.

"We are gaining upon them, Excellency—it will be Maestre after all."

"You are pleased that it should be so, Giovanni?"

"No less than your Excellency."

"Oh, but I am thinking little about it."

The youth's face became very grave.

"And yet the honour of a brave lady depends upon your safety, Excellency."

"Ah, yes. You are sensible of it, then, Giovanni?"

"Excellency, could I be otherwise? If you do not reach Maestre your promise to my mistress will not be performed."

"Yes—but no one would be aware of that."

"Do not be so sure, Count. Her life may be in your keeping."

"Her life?"

"As I say, her life. Remember it, Excellency, for she has trusted you."

Gaston reflected upon it a little while, then he said—

"You are an honest fellow. I will get to Maestre if I have to swim there. Are we still gaining upon them, Giovanni?"

"Considerably, Excellency. They are quite outdistanced."

"Then we may put these toys away?"

He touched his sword laughingly—but the young man made no answer. The report of a pistol echoed over the lagoon at this moment, and the bullet ricocheted upon the water like a stone thrown by a giant's hand. A second time the report rang out, and now the aim was better, for the woodwork of the cabin was splintered, and the lantern at the prow put out. Gaston looked very serious at this. He had not believed the affair to be so grave.

"Your poniard is not long enough, friend Giovanni," he exclaimed. "I think we had better wait for them."

"Excellency, you are forgetting Maestre."

"Not at all—but I do not wish to swim there."

"At least, we owe it to my mistress to go on."

"Your *barcerolo* does not think so. He appears to be resting upon his laurels."

"No, Excellency, but he has lost the channel. God help us, we are on the bank!"

He stood up and climbed out upon the high stem of the gondola . . . and such was his devotion to the mistress of his house, that tears stood in his eyes when he admitted the truth. The boatman, shielding himself from the pistol shots, had swerved in his stroke and driven their boat high upon the right bank of the waterway to Maestre. There was no help for it now—pursued and pursuer were side by side, while Gaston was still wondering what had happened; and when he too climbed out of the cabin, he perceived his own gondolier struggling helplessly in the

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Page 11

On the way to Maestre.

water, while a ruffian with a rapier in his hand struck at the fellow as he swam.

Now, Gaston had all the love of a good affray which youth and a soldier's instinct demand, and no sooner did he see the steel flashing than he sprang to the stern of his own boat, and, thrusting at the man with the rapier, he pinned him like a moth to the rail of his own cabin. There he would speedily have made an end of him but for a familiar voice crying out in the darkness, "Gaston, Gaston, what the devil are you doing?" and at the sound of this he lowered his point and laughed so loudly that they might have heard him at distant Murano.

"Joseph Villetard for a thousand ducats!"

"Your money to a *sou*. And you run from me like a pirate with a bride aboard. Come, come, Gaston, the General will laugh at this."

"He must laugh, Villetard; you nearly shot this poor devil here."

"Oh, *barceroli* are cheap enough in Venice. Give him a ducat and see the back of him. Here's my man drilled like a cart wheel. I shall charge you for him."

"I'll send the money from Maestre. If you are going there, we may make one journey of it."

Villetard laughed shrewdly.

"You are not going to Maestre, my dear Count."

"Indeed—and why not, Chevalier?"

"Because the General orders you to remain in Venice."

"The General?"

"Yes ; I have his written order here."

"But Chevalier—I must go—my honour demands it."

"We will talk of that by and by. I think I can satisfy you. It would never do to disobey the General—let us go back and speak of it. You need not fear for your friends at the Casa degli Spiriti. I'll protect them, Gaston."

He held out his hand as though to help the Count into his gondola ; but the young man Giovanni touched Gaston lightly upon the shoulder, and his mute eyes were full of unspoken reproach. The scene had now become almost weird, although it did not lack a certain grim humour. Of the gondolas, one was bedded firmly upon a bank of mud—the other drifted near by in the moonlight, and the figure upon it stood out clearly, silhouetted against a cold grey sky. A lantern swinging in a boatman's hand discovered the fellow in the water, clinging with hard fingers to his own ship—while upon Villetard's gondola the man whom Gaston had pricked cursed loud and long as he staunched a sharp wound. For a full mile, however, the hither water was destitute of ships, and such as moved in the hazy distance were chiefly fishing-boats drifting towards Lido. The Count himself stood hesitating at the side of his gondola. He was quite confused by Villetard's logic, and some minutes passed before he grasped the point of it.

"If the General sends me an order, he knows that I am alive, then," said he at last ; and this argument was very pleasing to him.

"Of course he knows," rejoined Villetard, eager for the lie as any gambler for a stake. "This farce has gone far enough. Come back with me, and I will show you how to serve your friends over yonder. You are quite right to think of them, Gaston; but it is unnecessary. And, besides, there is the General's order."

The young man Giovanni, drinking in every word, touched Gaston upon the shoulder for the second time, and reminded him of the promise.

"Your Excellency will go to Maestre—my mistress expects it of you," he said in a low voice.

"But, Messer Galla, you hear, there is no longer the necessity."

"Our honour is always a necessity, Excellency; besides, I do not believe that man."

"Oh, you know nothing about it. Return to the house and say that the necessity for my journey exists no longer. If it should prove that General Bonaparte is not informed, I will set out at once."

"But my mistress may suffer meanwhile, Excellency."

"Messer Galla, I will cut off my right hand before Madame la Marquise shall suffer anything on my account."

"Come, come," cried Villetard from the other boat. "What's the matter there, Count? Don't trouble about these fellows. They will float with the tide. What's the delay?"

"Nothing, my dear Chevalier; I am coming now."

He held out his hand to the young man and gave

him a hearty grip—in some way an excuse for his own action.

"Fear nothing," he said ; "you will hear good news of me."

But the youth did not answer. There were tears in his eyes.

CHAPTER XI

THREE DAYS AFTERWARDS

UPON the third day after the departure of Gaston de Joyeuse from her house, Beatrice went at an early hour, as was her habit, to worship in the cathedral ; and there, in that chapel where she had first seen her lover, she knelt before the altar and once again dropped a white rose upon the marble pavement. Perchance she could have given no possible reason for this display of a pretty sentiment ; for the rose was spurned by men's feet, and no hand was put out to shield its petals ; nevertheless, the act satisfied some instinct of her reason ; and just as this rose was trampled and torn, so she thought would the one romance of her life be buried.

She was far too able a woman not to understand the man for whom she had ventured so much and on whose account she might still be called upon to suffer. Gaston, she said, had been won by pity and friendship, it may have been by her beauty, to a momentary belief in an ardent passion, while,

at the same time, he was as far away from real enslavement as he had been upon their first meeting. Courteous, gallant, the lover of a great adventure, he had yet to learn to love any woman truly; and more than this, Beatrice believed that the finer qualities of his intellect would not be displayed until some woman brought about the true awakening, and held him in the bondage of devotion. Yet, whether she or another were to claim this right, she did not dare to ask herself—and very gently and tenderly she laid her rose upon the pavement that heavy feet might trample it into the dust. Another flower would grow upon the bush whence she had gathered it, just as in the story of their own lives another page must be turned.

This vague sentiment kept her in the chapel long after the priest had left the altar, and when she quitted it with the young man Giovanni, who in all these visits was her *sigisbeo*, or cavalier, she was a little astonished to find quite a group of youths and girls on the Piazza before the cathedral doors. At first she believed that some notorious character of the day had visited the church and remained within; but in this she was soon undeceived, for the people stared at her persistently, while a lad in the rear ranks threw his hat into the air and cried, "*Viva Beatrice!*" This cry the others speedily took up; and, following the subject of it down the Piazzetta toward the Grand Canal, they, too, threw their caps aloft and shouted "*Beatrice! Beatrice!*" in a tone which left no

doubt of their pleasure. And so the uproar spread, and shopmen came from their shops and merchants from their offices, breakfasters from the *cafés*, and even servants from the palace to laugh and shout together, "*Viva Beatrice!*"

Now Beatrice was not a little alarmed, and a shiver of indefinable fear accompanied the question "Why do these people applaud me, and what is their motive?" It is true to say that it was a question she had the wit but not the will to answer; and in some way to excuse herself, she called the youth Giovanni to her side and made a pretence of learning his opinion.

"What is the matter, Giovanni? Why do these people follow us?"

Galla answered at once with downcast eyes and a step that quickened as he walked.

"Because they are pleased with us, Excellency—that is why they follow us."

"But why should they be pleased with us, Giovanni—what have we done to please them?"

"They think that we have done much, Excellency—for them and for the city."

"I do not understand you, Giovanni—be plain with me."

"Excellency, I am perfectly plain—as plain as that catch which it pleases them to sing."

Beatrice heard it for herself and her face flushed crimson while she had all the impulse to run from the people and hide herself. One of the *zanni* who followed, a common clown from a booth by

the water's edge, had raised the people's love-song—

“Lei non m'amava no!”

and this was taken up with so good a zest that the whole Piazza sung it presently with stentorian lungs, and even the young girls lifted their fresh voices to the jest. So plainly meant it was that Beatrice could not pretend to be indifferent even before Giovanni.

“They have our secret—there is danger, Giovanni,” she said.

“My Lady,” he answered, “there has always been danger; to-day it is a little nearer to us, that is all.”

The crowd followed them to the water's edge; and afterwards in other gondolas towards the church of San Zaccaria and their home. Flower-sellers had come in with their tangled burdens by this time, and many a youth snatched a spray of roses or gave one to the girl at his side that she might fling it into Beatrice's cabin. It was very evident that these idle masqueraders were very pleased with my lady, and the revelry upon the water wanted but the satisfaction of her in whose honour it was held to be worthy of some mad day of carnival. From every *riva*, every canal, gondolas were thrust out to join the wild procession; and when the leading boat turned at last into the narrow waterway by which you come to the church of San Zaccaria, so great was the press that it blocked the whole channel and brought

the police hurrying to the place. Beatrice had never been so glad to re-enter her own house as she was upon that day; but even then surprise was not at an end, for no lacquey in scarlet threw open the double doors of bronze, nor did any await her in the hall beyond. Fiametta, a trembling maid, was the only one to answer her mistress's astonished exclamations.

"The men—what has become of them, girl?"

"They have left the house, my Lady; they went an hour ago."

"At whose bidding, child—do you not see how impatient I am?"

"I do not know, my Lady—the *custodi* sent and there was a messenger from the Palace. Then we spoke of it and—God forgive them—they all went off together."

"You say there was a messenger from the palace. Did he leave a name?"

"The Captain Paul da Ponte, Excellency."

The young man Giovanni took a step forward at the mention of this name, while Beatrice put out a hand against the balustrade of the staircase. Her face was whiter than the marble of the walls. She had heard the name of, perhaps, the one man who had ever won her fear and dread. Paul, the libertine, the by-word, the agent of all baseness, why had they sent him to her house?"

"Did Captain Paul leave a message for me?"

"That he would return, Excellency."

She would bear no more, but very pale and

trembling went up to the lonely rooms, and thence, as one in deep reverie, looked forth from the windows of her house. The hour was fateful, she knew—the hazard had been cast and now she must reap of it—but what? She shuddered and turned from the sunlight.

Some one was knocking at the doors below. It was my Lord of Brescia, open-mouthed and grinning, come to tell her that all was known, and to bid her send Gaston de Joyeuse to the Senate at once.

"What has happened that I come unannounced?" he began upon the threshold, ogling her with ravenous eyes and plainly intimating the extent of his knowledge. "Are so many servants needed to wait upon a stranger that your own people must go nameless? I see, I see—and yet, my child, since we are all human, who am I to blame you. The hour for that is gone by—they are ringing the bells to-day for Beatrice. Why should my voice be the one to condemn?"

"My dear Lord," she rejoined in her coldest voice, "do you come from the supper table or is this learned upon the Piazzetta? Pray control yourself—sit a little while and think upon it. You are at the Casa degli Spiriti and I am your kinswoman. Surely you have forgotten it."

Lorenzo was always a little afraid of Beatrice, even in her gentle moods, and it needed but this brief word to humble him before her. Changing his tone at once, he shuffled into the room and addressed her meekly.

"I jest, of course. Even the wise may unbend before a woman. Let me know the truth without delay. They say that this man is in your house—that his presence here answers Bonaparte and saves the city. I come to know if the bells must be silent. Open your windows and you will hear their music. It should fall on greedy ears, Marquise—the answer of Venice to the man who has insulted her. Let me have the truth that I may rejoice with them."

Beatrice, from her place in the window, heard the mellow bells which told the amazed people how Bonaparte had been outwitted, and their notes fell upon her ears one by one like the message of a dirge. Her wonderful dignity, however, remained to her, and she answered Lorenzo without a quaver.

"I will tell you the truth, my Lord. The Count de Joyeuse left this house three days ago."

"He left the house—ah, clever! Our good name is preserved at all costs. The young man goes into hiding until he is wanted. A masterly stroke. I should never have thought of that, Beatrice."

"There is no doubt of it, Lorenzo, you never would have thought of it."

The admission ended in a bitter little laugh, as Beatrice turned from the window and came over to the low chair in which he was seated. She felt as a player in some flippant comedy where tears must wait upon laughter, but no happiness upon both. The vague danger shadowed

her every step, but did not rob her of her courage.

"Yes," she said, standing beside him. "The Count left this house, and he will not return, Lorenzo. There's the song for your bells. They should have rung them at midnight before our friend sailed. To-day it is too late."

Lorenzo laughed loudly at that which he was pleased to call her excellent acting.

"I see, I see, the young man sails for Terra Firma, where the guard will arrest him and bring him back. Nothing simpler is to be thought of. You are really a genius, my child. . . . I will tell it to the serenity this very day. They will remember that you are my kinswoman—yes, it is natural that much should be expected of you. So you sent him to Maestre—ha, ha, ha !"

His enjoyment of it was delightful to see, that of a simple mind capable of honest merriment ; and he continued to repeat "So you sent him to Maestre, oh, wonderful," until the tears rolled down his cheeks. When he had somewhat recovered himself, he asked another question.

"In whose gondola did this ungallant fellow sail, then ?"

"In one of your own, my Lord, which Giovanni brought from the Palace at noon."

"But if that is so, I shall have the credit of it, Marquise ?"

"I could deny you nothing which gives you so much gratification, Lorenzo."

"You are a daughter to me. This will be a

feather in my cap, eh ? I shall tell it to the Council at this morning's sitting. Here's oil for their lamp, an apple for their basket. Yes ; it will be that. And the people will hear of it—you would not keep it from the people, Beatrice—don't say that ?”

“I am not saying it, Lorenzo—at least, while the people are in their present mood.”

“Then you think the mood may change ?”

“All things are possible at such a time.”

“Oh, the future's to the future. What can happen to-day, for instance ? As well tell me that your Gaston has passed the guards and gone back to Bonaparte.”

“I think it very like, Lorenzo.”

“Oh, nonsense, nonsense. What officer would pass him ?”

“Those who read your authority.”

“My authority ?”

“Yes, given in this very house. Have you forgotten it so soon ?”

“But that was to the young man Bernadine.”

“Indeed, no, my Lord, to the Count de Joyeuse. I read it myself.”

Lorenzo sprang to his feet with a bound. Terror gave him strength.

“God in heaven !—you don't mean that it was not for your young man Bernadine ?”

“Ask them at Maestre, my Lord, who passed at dawn.”

“But this—this would hang me between the columns of the Piazzetta. You are quite unaware of what you are saying, Beatrice.”

"Then do not believe me, Lorenzo. The future to the future, as you say."

"I implore you deal frankly with me. Was the young man who left your house with my pass and in my gondola, was this young man Bernadine or another?"

"As frankly, Lorenzo—he was another."

"And his name?"

"Gaston de Joyeuse."

"Then God help me!—I am surely lost."

"Have you no place for me in your prayers, Lorenzo?"

"None whatever; you have taken a shameful advantage of me—besides you are a woman and a clever one, while I—but we will not speak of that. Please bid them call my gondola. I will go to the Palace at once. Something may yet be done."

Beatrice laughed girlishly and held out her hand.

"Since no servants are left to me, I fear your gondola must go uncalled, Lorenzo. Oh, have no fear—we cannot spare our great men. Are you not the people's favourite? Who will dare to harm you?"

He thought upon it; biting his nails and so wild in face and manner that if it had been any other, Beatrice would have pitied him with all her woman's heart. But this two-faced apostle of the vanities she did not pity at all—and he, white and tottering, would not bestow a single thought upon her.

"I will go to the Palace—they shall hear me. I will appeal to the people. Get to your prayers,

THREE DAYS AFTERWARDS 155

woman—get to your prayers. You see how the Divine justice visits you. This may be my last day of freedom. Merciful God, I believe it is that !”

He went off raving, while Beatrice watched him from the lonely house.

CHAPTER XII

PAUL DA PONTE

HOW lonely the house was she did not learn until the sun set, when Giovanni Galla came to light the candles in her boudoir. He found her brooding over her writing, and with some servility and much kindness, he asked her pleasure.

"At what time will your Excellency be pleased to sup?"

Beatrice put down her pen and did not answer him until she herself had put a question.

"The servants—have they returned, Giovanni?"

"They have not, your Excellency, but my father is here and the young girl's sister."

"Then we shall do very well. Please to tell me why the others left me. I think that you must know, Giovanni."

"I have thought of it, Excellency—but——"

"Well, Giovanni——"

"Captain Paul da Ponte—they know his name, Excellency."

Beatrice sighed, and, emboldened by her kindness, the young steward crossed the room quickly, and, kneeling at her feet, implored her to hear him.

"Excellency, they were wise to go. For God's sake listen to what I have to say. When the Captain returns you will be alone. This house is no longer to be thought of. Quit it at once with me—my father's roof will shelter you. I have friends among the people, Excellency. It is not too late—the moments are precious—for the love of Christ do not refuse me!"

Not once in his ten years of service at the Casa degli Spiriti had Giovanni Galla addressed his mistress with such passionate earnestness; and now his very audacity amazed him, and he trembled as he knelt and must put a hand out to steady himself. It were as though the eloquent eyes would read a message of life and death upon the pale face of the woman before him; and he waited, kneeling, as the humblest servant of those tottering fortunes. But Beatrice hid her face when she answered him, and he could not see her tears.

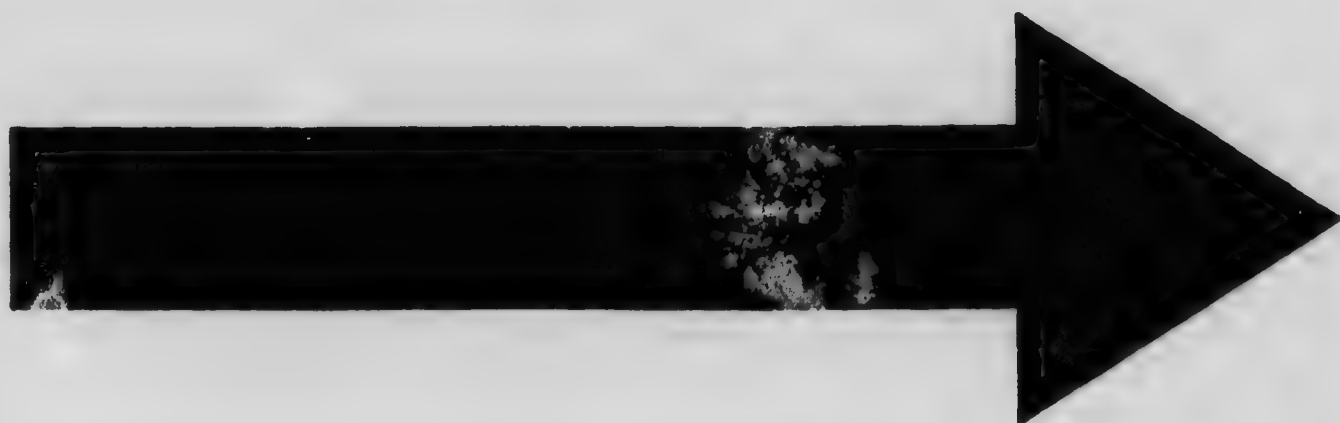
"Thank you, Giovanni, thank you for your love," she said in a low voice. "I have need of it surely. But you must not speak of going away, my friend. That would never do. In Venice it is the men run away from the women, is it not? I mean to stay here, Giovanni. It is my house, and I will never leave it while I have such as you to befriend me. There, go now. I understand and am grateful to you. Go, and say that I fear nothing."

He quitted her side reluctantly, and for a little while she went on with her writing. The house was still with an ominous silence of foreboding ; the clocks ticked the seconds as sentinels who paced calamity. The room in which Beatrice sat was Gaston's room ; every ornament reminded her of the man she loved so passionately, and yet seemed to have loved in vain. Why had he left her ? she asked again. Could they not have gone to Maestre together, fled this city of disaster and found a haven in the mountains ? She answered herself that Gaston's pity was akin to love, but nothing more. And some day a woman would teach him the lesson in which she had failed—and, failing, had given all for his freedom. The bitterness of it chilled her heart. What gifts did she lack, then ? Was her beauty unsatisfying, her wit shallow, her art of pleasing false and vain ? The mirror laughed at the critic before it. "You are very beautiful, my Lady," it said. And she believed the mirror because she was the servant of truth.

Yes, she was very beautiful, and the new fashion of dress, which the Directory had sent from Paris, was a perfect corona to a flower so rare. The long muslin tunic with the embroidered bands of cloth, so thin, so fragile, that every movement of her shapely limbs was echoed by it—the girdle at her bosom, the sandals of the mock Augustan comedy, the purple net for the hair—they lost their dramatic tawdriness upon Beatrice, and were justified every one. And she laced this finery for whom ? For the Captain Paul da Ponte, the

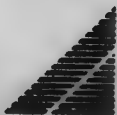
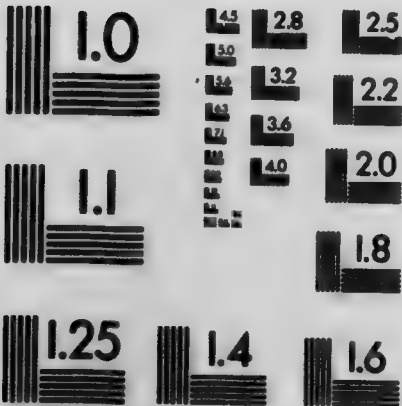
greatest rogue in Venice, as ruinour said. But Beatrice knew her dangers and her armament. She feared this man, and yet, alone, driven, friendless, she determined to face him. The minutes of waiting were like the drip of water upon a marble pavement. She counted them, moved restlessly to and fro, went sometimes to the head of the great staircase, roamed about in the darkened rooms, started back from shadows, and trembled at the sound of her own voice. What fate was written for her this night? A great bell booming in the silence cried, "Now you shall know." Paul da Ponte was upon the threshold at last, and she, from her place at the stairs' head, watched him as he entered—a monstrous figure of justice with his satellites about him. Beatrice knew those satellites. They were the Slavonians—the most brutal and lawless of the mercenaries then in Venice. She turned from them without a word and re-entered Gaston's room.

Paul da Ponte opened many doors before he arrived at the little *salon*, and Beatrice could hear him going from room to room with heavy tread and jangling arms, as a man who knows that the bird is caged and cannot by any chance escape him. In her own room at last, the flood of light blinded him and he drew back a step, amazed at her quiet dignity and at the attitude in which he found her—for she had seated herself at a writing-table and turned a page when he entered. No disappointment cried into the darkness here. Paul da Ponte shut the door behind him and bowed



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deferentially. He had some manners and it was not ill done.

"Madame la Marquise, a thousand pardons, but this visit is not unexpected, I believe."

Beatrice laid down her pen discreetly and rejoined without effort—

"So little, Signore, that I have been expecting you since noon."

He took a step forward into the light and showed a florid face with a heavy flaxen moustache and a Teuton countenance not altogether displeasing. His dress was that of the Sclavonian troop—a dark green tunic with gold buttons and sash, high riding boots, a heavy cloak, a feathered hat. He smiled while he spoke and made it plain that he had good teeth. His hands were coarse and heavy and his lips pouting and crimson.

"Now," he said, recovering himself with easy assurance, "that is good news. They let fall a hint of trouble—but I am never well pleased to intrude upon a lady—unless she asks me—no, upon my word, and so here I am, Madame, and here's my authority."

He found a document in the breast of his tunic, and, passing it that she might read it, awaited her response with declared impatience.

"You are aware then of the contents of this letter, Signore?" she asked him, in her turn.

"Perfectly aware, my Lady. The Savi was pleased with what you have done and will now take the work upon their own shoulders—I come for it like a tailor for the cloth."

"Being quite sure that it is to be found, Signore?"

"Being quite determined to find it, Madame."

Beatrice rose from her seat with an air of gentle dignity which led the Captain to believe that she abandoned all resistance to his authority. As she crossed the room she said—

"Determination is sometimes less useful than submission, Captain. Let me tell you at once that the Comte de Joyeuse is not in this house."

The soldier was much amused. He bowed with the gallant air of one who would say, "That is necessary."

"As you please, Madame," he said. "I will wait then until he returns. Apprehend nothing from my indiscretion, I implore you. In this matter, your own confessor shall not be more discreet."

She shrank from the insult, but would not stoop to defend herself before such as Paul da Ponte.

"I owe nothing to discretion," she said firmly. "The Count left my house at midnight three days ago, and passed Maestre at dawn upon the following day. The guard will confirm it, Signore. Let the Council send to Terra Firma—and be quite sure," she added, "that I have not forgotten the possibility of such a story as this."

Captain Paul heard her with honest admiration. He was very glad that she should not tell the truth, because the truth would drive him from her house. And was there another woman in the city, he asked himself, who could be so splendidly mendacious.

"Madame," he rejoined, throwing himself into a

chair, and nodding his head significantly, "better than ever, upon my word—and I see how little you trust me. Let me repeat my instructions. I am to present myself to you and to thank you in the name of the Serene Prince, who will supplement my thanks upon a later occasion . . . that comes first. Afterwards, there is the business. Your friend the Count and I are to appear at the Palace without loss of time. If it will help you, permit me to say it once more—'at the Palace, Madame, without loss of time.' Now that's fair, isn't it? You have done what is necessary on your part—I on mine. We'll make an end of it and hear the Count."

He rose and faced her. She was serenely calm and a smile rested upon her handsome face.

"If you wish to hear the Count, I must send you to Maestre," she said, and then, "of course you doubt me. Truth and expectation are poor friends sometimes, Signore. Well, I have told you that Monsieur de Joyeuse has returned to Gratz."

"It is not true, Madame—you are telling me a lie."

She started back, and the fingers of her hands were hot against her palms. If there had been a weapon to her hand, she would have struck him.

"Captain da Ponte, does the Signory instruct you to tell me this?"

He retorted brutally—

"The Signory instruct me to do my duty. Come, what do you fear? There's not a child in Venice that does not know the story. Do you think you can put this man in your wallet like a satchel of

lilac? No, no, my Lady, I must see him, here and now; he must go with me—your miracle-worker who jumps the water, and don't tell me he's at Maestre," he went on, "for the guard has been questioned already. No Frenchman has passed the guardhouse there for a week. I'll admit it was clever, though—yes, it sounded well at the time; but this is the cage, Madame, and I'm here to open it. Now will you be reasonable?"

A man more discerning, less a disciple of the crude god brutality, would have read the true story of the flight in the agonised look which passed upon the childish face and seemed to age it—even while she stood. Terror, doubt, but above all the piteous entreaty of a great sorrow, were written in the wondering eyes when the Captain said, "He has not passed the guard." The man she loved had betrayed her, then. Her pride reeled before this avowal.

"No," she cried in pathetic protest. "Before God it is true—Gaston de Joyeuse is on the road to Gratz. I know it—I will swear it."

"In vain, Madame—he is in this house."

"Then seek him, Signore—seek and find if you can."

Such was her defiant challenge while every nerve twitched, and the lights of the *salon* danced before her eyes. For herself, for the danger, for the clack of evil tongues she cared nothing; but this story of a great betrayal broke down in an instant the gatehouse of her courage and left her defenceless before them all. Paul da Ponte, in his turn too wanting in

penetration to make anything of her anger, set down as a subterfuge and picked up the glove as defiantly.

"I intend to seek him, Marquise—pity you should give me the trouble. Come, I'm not afraid of you. We'll take you at your word, though I can't answer for my rough fellows in your pretty house. They've been to the wars and learned something, Marquise—how to steal and burn for the honour of our great Republic. I've heard them called Slavonian devils before now. Well, we shall see."

He turned away with a brutal laugh, and called his fellows from the hall below. Like hounds unleashed for the hunting they swarmed up the staircase and spread themselves about the house, while Da Ponte himself stood at the boudoir door to direct them. Hither and thither, as ferrets in a warren, they burrowed and scraped, tearing the curtains from their rings, and beating in the doors that were locked. A woeful sound of splintering wood and bending iron joined itself to their raucous voices and the heavy footsteps upon the stairs. When upon this a woman's scream echoed through the house, their captain looked at Beatrice for the first time since it had begun.

"You hear," he said; "they are questioning your servants. That pains you—well, I'm pained, too. Why do you compel me to do it, Marquise? Why are you not reasonable?"

"I have answered you," she answered with majestic dignity.

"With anything but the truth. Whom does that

serve? You hear my men—they don't believe you. Well, I don't either. Why should you hide this man? Do you think we are going to eat him? It is nothing of the kind. We have had to pay a good price for his ghost, and now we want some of our money back. Let him come with me and I will pledge my word that he shall meet with nothing worse than a good supper and a pass to Maestre. You must know why we want him, Marquise—I refuse to believe that you don't—besides, what have you got to gain? Just nothing—the usual price of a woman's folly."

Beatrice listened unmoved. The interlude, trying as it might have been under other circumstances, permitted her to take a wider mental survey of her position, and from that first bitter exclamation upon her lover's want of faith, she passed to the consolation of its doubtfulness. If Gaston had not arrived at Maestre, was she therefore to believe that he was still in Venice? Not necessarily, she said. Circumstances might have shaped a new course for him. Perchance he had landed at Chioggia or joined one of the French ships anchored beyond the Lido. Yes, she had been a thousand times foolish to let conclusion take her by the shoulders. She had read the hearts of many men in the eventful years, and one alone had been an open book to her. Whatever charge of instability and shallowness she might prefer against Gaston de Joyeuse, of dishonour she would never accuse him.

Paul da Ponte was quite conscious of the new demeanour, but he could in no way account for it.

She was pale, weary, but the light had come back to her eyes and a smile hovered about her lips.

"Captain da Ponte," she said, and when she said it he was aware that she feared him no longer. "I have nothing to gain, as you say. If the Comte de Joyeuse were in this house, do you think that I could hide him? A clever man would have taken my word. How would a lie serve me, when ten minutes must contradict it? No, you must consult me; but I have a good memory, Signor, an excellent memory, and I promise you the first place in it."

The threat, seemingly so puny, amused him. He strode to the door and threw it wide open that she might see what was happening in the hall beyond. His claims for the Sclavonians, that men had called them devils, erred, if at all, upon the side of modesty. There was not a room in the upper stories of the house which they had not already searched—some with pistols, some with lanterns, these hacking the locks with their swords, those pillaging with the butt ends of their muskets, the troop laughed and yelled, sang and cursed, like so many Turks let loose upon a sanctuary. In the hall itself the young man Giovanni and his father, Pedro, lay bound back to back, and were the sport of ruffians who rolled them headlong on the marble floor; but Fiametta, the maid, ran down screaming to Beatrice's side and clung to her mistress in a frantic appeal.

"Save me, for the love of God, Excellency!"

Beatrice drew the child to her, but she did not say any word which might provoke Da Ponte. It



Captain Paul exercises his authority



had been his purpose to satisfy himself of the truth or falsity of her story, and while he permitted his ruffians to leave their mark for ever upon the Casa degli Spiriti, he knew exactly to what extent the Senate would support him; and now, it appeared, these limits were reached. He called the men off with an angry oath, and bidding some of them to the *salon*, he sent the other to the sport below.

"Marquise," he said, with truculent effrontery, "I am going to question your servants myself. We shall begin with this girl."

A dozen sturdy troopers answered the signal and formed up in rails about the two women, so standing that Beatrice could feel the breath of their sergeant upon her cheek. Da Ponte seated himself at the head of the table and made a pretence of taking a pen in his hand. His first word was to Fiametta.

"Come, girl," he cried hastily, "who are you and what is your name?"

Fiametta trembled so much that she could do nothing but cling to her mistress and sob bitterly. Da Ponte's patience was soon exhausted.

"Make her answer, Giuseppe," he said to his sergeant; "make the hussy speak."

The fellow needed no second invitation. A monstrous ruffian, with a black stubbly beard and little winking eyes, and stiff hair rising straight up from a peasant's head, he laid a heavy hand upon the girl's shoulder and dragged her toward the table.

"Do you hear the Captain, girl? Then answer him."

Beatrice shuddered but did not remonstrate. She knew that every word would heap up new insults for her. Some day, she said, Paul da Ponte should pay a heavy price for this night's work. The girl's terror pleased him—he caught her hand and dragged her nearer to him.

"Come, girl, what is your name?"

Fiametta was dumb. Fright had robbed her of speech. Three times Da Ponte questioned her and then flung the pen from him impatiently.

"Take her below, Giuseppe. Some of you will loosen her tongue, I'll warrant. Let her cry a new tune."

They snatched the girl up and carried her shrieking from the room. The arms which held Beatrice back from Fiametta's side, tore the gown from her shoulders and left the blue imprint of brutal fingers. She sank half fainting into a chair. Da Ponte took up his pen again.

"I perceive that your servants have been well trained, Marquise," he continued blandly. "We will try again, if you please." And then to Giuseppe, "Let them bring the men here—father and son. I think they will have something to tell us."

They brought the pair to the room and cut the ropes which bound them. Pedro, the old man, bled from a wound in his face, but Giovanni's lips were firmly closed, and he gazed about him furtively as one that has escaped into the light and is dazed thereby; but he would not permit his eyes to meet those of his mistress, and when he looked at Paul da Ponte, the blood flushed his cheeks.

"And so you are Giovanni Galla, my fine fellow?"

"As your Excellency says—Giovanni Galla."

"Willing, I see, and also impudent. I must ask you some questions, Messer Galla. Please be careful how you answer them."

"Care is necessary when answering your Excellency."

"Then be doubly careful now. You are acquainted with the Count of Joyeuse, Messer Galla?"

"Perfectly acquainted, Excellency."

"And you know that he has been in this house because you have waited upon him?"

"It is as your Excellency says."

"Ah, the truth at last. And the Count has left you, Messer Galla. When did he leave you?"

"Three days ago at midnight, Excellency."

"A most obedient liar, upon my word. Stand down, young man, while we consult this ancient oracle. Your father, I understand. Well, old gentleman, they have dealt a little roughly with you, I see. Your own fault, Ancient, your own fault. Come, be reasonable, now. I am not here to do your mistress an injury, but a service. Tell me where I shall find the Count and I will leave this house upon the instant."

The old man looked up, and, taking a step forward, he said—

"You will never find Count Gaston—you have not the brains."

An angry murmur from the troop of men found

no echo from their captain. The old man's boldness rather pleased him. He laid no claim to brains—those were for the churchmen and the old women at the palace. He was a soldier and never thought much of brains.

"Possibly," he said, leaning back in his chair, "possibly I have no brains, old man, but it is quite unnecessary for you to tell me so. Let me know where I shall find the Count of Joyeuse and I will forgive your impertinence."

And here he leant over the table menacingly.

"But if you don't tell me, old man, by St. Mark and all the Saints, I will cut your tongue out."

The old man listened to the threat and held himself bravely to answer it.

"By the heaven above me, I will not answer you a single word," he said.

Da Ponte half rose from his seat and stretched out an angry hand.

"Then take the consequences, imbecile. Giuseppe, teach this old rogue how to speak. Quick about it—teach him."

He stood up and lifted a candle to see the work. Upon three at least in the room the agony of dread had fallen. Was he serious in this new brutality? Was the threat meant? Impossible to believe it. And yet the man Giuseppe crossed the room with firm tread, while others seized Pedro by the shoulders, and forced him upon his knees.

"Speak, old man! Will you speak?"

"I have spoken," he said.

They forced his head back and tried to drag out

his tongue with fingers itching for the work. A cry of pain and the shuffling steps told the grim story sufficiently. There was no other sound in the room when the young man, Giovanni, lifted a bronze figure from the table before him and struck one heavy blow at the face of the ruffian Giuseppe.

The man fell heavily without a groan, and lay huddled face downward upon the carpet. Then a shout arose and a woman's lingering cry, and it seemed that the whole room was alight with the sheen of flashing blades, cutting, slashing at one darting figure. As a hare from the dogs, Giovanni slipped from the swords. Glass was shattered, the candelabra overturned, man heaped upon man in frenzied grappling—but Giovanni had the skin of an eel, the quickness of an animal. He was by them, through them, over them—the swords hacked wood, cloth, even the limbs of friends, but they hardly touched the fleeting figure. The window was Giovanni's goal. He reached it over his mistress's body, and, bursting it open with one powerful thrust of his supple shoulders, he ran out on the veranda with three at his heels. La Ponte's loud cry to cut him down, his oaths and imprecations, were wasted upon the night air. Giovanni knew every step of that perilous way. He climbed the trellis like a cat, balanced himself nimbly upon the high wall, pursued it as though it had been a garden path—leaped at last from its further end and cleaved the black water below like a bolt from the blue. None dared to follow him there. The lagging gondolas carried lanterns to the hunt, but their light showed

nothing human. Giovanni was dripping then upon the *campo* by the church of San Zaccaria. When he disappeared into one of the narrow lanes giving off the square, he seemed to know quite well where the road would carry him. For a brief moment he looked back at the house he had left, and then, with a slight shudder of the memory, he began to run. He might yet be in time.

Within the house all was now confusion and dismay. The dead body of the sergeant Giuseppe lay, covered by a cloak, at the head of the great staircase. The troopers themselves, dismissed from the *salon*, debated the tragedy in angry groups. Paul da Ponte was alone with Beatrice, and he did not know whether she were alive or dead. He called the maid Fiametta, and bade her attend to her mistress. Then he closed the door and waited with bent ear. Not yet was he sure that a true account of this night's work would be welcome to those who sent him. Nor was his task entirely finished. He should have been less brutal, he thought, for here was a woman from whom terror won nothing.

CHAPTER XIII

A MORT

THE Captain of the Mercenaries remained at the door of Beatrice's room until he was satisfied that it was well with her ; then with a brief word of relief he went downstairs to give instructions to his men. It was plain to him now that the young man Giovanni had escaped with his story to the city ; but Paul da Ponte was not the man to be surprised by such an advantage, and he set about the business of his excuses without any loss of time. For a full hour there were messages to and fro between the Casa degli Spiriti and the Ducal Palace ; gondolas drifted about the steps of the house and men passed in and out with letters at their girdles. To the Senate the Captain told a brief story. The French Count, he said, was not with Madame la Marquise ; but it might be supposed that he would return, when, if the Savi so pleased, he should be brought to the Palace instantly. Furthermore, he made a pretence of asking the pleasure of his superiors, and signed himself, his tongue in his cheek, their faithful servant ; and, this being done,

he dispatched other troopers to the houses of his friends that he might find support should his shrewd defence miscarry. Not a clever man by any manner of means, Da Ponte, nevertheless, was equipped with a certain vulgar cunning which served him well in the decadent days of Venice. And now opportunity had come stumbling upon him, and he embraced it with clumsy arms. So far had Beatrice of Venice stood above his schemes yesterday, that even his audacity made no mention of her in its wildest flights. Rich, well befriended, high in favour, she had passed him by in the public hour and the private, not disdainfully, but as one who was totally unaware of his existence. In his turn, the night of wonders had set him in her house to be the master of it, her judge and jailor. He would be a fool, he said, not to gather the last ear of such a harvest of opportunity; and emboldened by the advantage, he could go further and say that she, herself, might not be unwilling to purchase his friendship upon any terms—even marriage, and the right to her name and possessions. Herein was a fool's hope, which exacted from him a curse upon his own clumsiness, and the manner of the first assault. She was not a woman to be coerced, he remembered; and coercion profiting nothing, he bethought him of persuasion.

The idea pleased him, and he lost no time in the execution of it. A brief word cleared the hall of the Slavonians, who had come so exultingly to stand for justice and a little pillage. Da Ponte sent the most of them about their business upon the paltriest

excuses, which deceived no one, the men least of all. No gallant from Florian's, seeking a rendezvous with mincing gait, could have mounted the stairs as nimbly as this clumsy lover returning to his chosen mistress ; and when he knocked upon her door, a woman's fingers might have craved admittance for him—nevertheless, he was not a little astonished to find Beatrice at her writing-table, and an interval of stammering hesitation confessed his surprise.

"Marquise," he exclaimed at last, in a tone which should have provoked her laughter—"Marquise, I have come to apologise."

It was much for him, a real shedding of pride and the vanities, and when my lady did not even look up from her table, he imagined that astonishment forbade her to speak, and he repeated it with unction.

"I have come to apologise, Marquise. What has happened is a source of annoyance to me. But after all," and here he fingered the brim of his hat as awkwardly as any boy in the schoolhouse, "there has not been much harm done."

Beatrice laid down her pen, and the light of candles declared in the swollen eyes and the flushed cheeks the tense hour through which she had lived.

"Captain da Ponte," she said shrewdly, "when you leave my house I will accept your apology."

Da Ponte flung his hat upon the table, and, seating himself in one of the low chairs near to him, tried to make out a case for himself.

"Impossible," he said ; "you know that I cannot go. If you had told me everything in the first place,

all this might have been spared you, and the life of an honest man saved. It is very unfortunate, Marquise, but I must do my duty."

"A coward's refuge—his duty. Does your apology, then, mean that my servant Giovanni is dead?"

The question cost her an effort, and she trembled when she spoke of Giovanni's death. Da Ponte, however, saw his advantage.

"Nothing of the kind," he hastened to say; "it is I who must deplore a faithful fellow. Your young man Giovanni is half way to Maestre by this time. A marvel, my lady, for he runs like a Greek. I am left, you see, to look after the house. That is what I came to say. Everything must go on as though this had not happened. I have sent to the Palace for my orders, and, perhaps, they will recall me. Well, that will be good news for both of us, but I don't see why we should starve meanwhile. Let us have supper together, and see if something cannot be done. Upon my word, I like your courage, Marquise. If you will have me for a friend, I think I can put this right; but you must tell me the truth—I can do nothing until I know it."

Beatrice had listened with some indifference to the beginning of this harangue, but as it proceeded she took up her pen and continued her writing. When next she spoke she had the air of one pre-occupied and but half aware of that which had been said.

"The truth is all about you, Captain da Ponte—I can add nothing to it. If you are the master of this house, my wishes will scarcely concern you. Pray

give your orders. The maid will show you the wine cellar. Perhaps you will be more at your ease if I decline your flattering invitation."

"Oh, come, that's mere pretence. You began by provoking me and now you insult me. Well, I know women and I can laugh at it. You are clever enough to be reasonable. I can make things pleasant or otherwise, just as I choose. It is for you to take or leave my offer, but it won't be repeated. I have apologised to you for doing my duty. There are not many men in Venice who would have done as much—are there, now?"

"Unhappy Venice! I am indeed fortunate, Captain. Shall I take you at your word? Do you really desire to make it easy for me?"

"A soldier's word—upon my honour."

"Then leave this room, and do not enter it again until I invite you. I put you to the proof. Leave me and I will begin to believe you?"

He rose instantly and took up his hat.

"I certainly will go," he said, "and" with a laugh, "take the key of the cellar with me; but I warn you that I expect much. Shall we say to-morrow morning for an understanding?"

He crossed the room, and, stooping, whispered in her ear—

"To-morrow morning for an understanding between you and me."

Beatrice replied without looking at him—

"At any hour you please, Signore."

She was alone now, and she pushed the paper away from her with just impatience, and locked the

door of the *salon* behind the burly figure. Not for a single instant had he deceived her. She knew that he would remain in her house until the whole story of Gaston's flight was told at the Palace. She knew that every hour of the morrow would bring fresh dangers, new insults. Everything that had been done was characteristic of a government alternately imbecile and driven by panic. The womanly wit drew up a case with a lawyer's acumen. She perceived how the possibility of deriding Bonaparte had pleased the dunces who had not the brains to barter with him. She pictured their rage when it was known that Gaston had fled Venice and that the opportunity was lost. Instable, shifty as they were, what more natural than that their rage should be vented upon one whom they believed to be the agent of this almost tragic mishap. The fickle people who had cheered her, Beatrice de St. Remy, yesterday, would stone her to-morrow. Even could she escape the house new dangers must await her on Terra Firma and the islands. She foresaw herself sacrificed to the chagrin of the hour, made the scapegoat of the national folly, and she declared it ironical beyond expression that her danger at home should be less than her danger abroad. Nevertheless, had she confessed all, the truth might have been that the presence of this man affrighted her beyond anything she had known in all the years. But the truth was the last thing she would confess, and she said always, "My wit shall save me, and he shall be the foil between me and the people."

It was her only hope. Fiametta, the maid, return-

ing from the inner room, found her almost radiant in the possession of it. She would turn the tables upon Paul da Ponte, as she had turned them upon Lorenzo, the dotard, and many another who had withstood her in Venice. Yes, wit should be her ally.

"The room is ready, my Lady, if you wish to sleep," Fiametta said.

Beatrice drew the child close to her and kissed her upon both cheeks.

"Child," she said, "who gave you this courage?"

"You, my Lady; I learned it in your house."

"Ah, you say so. Well, we are alone now, and God knows whether we are right to be sorry or glad. Light the candles, child, light them all. I fear the dark—yes, I fear it to-night—and every candle is a friend to me. Do you think that you could sleep, Fiametta—no, I'm sure you could not. We will watch and pray together, child: prayer is left to us still, and faith in our God."

Fiametta said, "Yes, yes, we can always believe, my Lady;" but the words were a mere echo, and, in truth, she was wondering all the time when the Captain would return, and what he would say. Her own danger was passed by, and so she could turn a laughing face to the light.

"Giovanni will serve us," she cried consolingly; "I believe in Giovanni. He will go to our friends. He told me so when they beat him in the hall. 'Da Ponte shall pay for it,' he said. Giovanni certainly is clever."

Beatrice shook her head, though she would not tell the girl how little any man's help might serve

her in such a dire hour or against such odds of circumstance. True, the moment was one of armistice; but its duration must be the pleasure of a scoundrel, and its final outcome new insults—perchance that which was worse than insult—a thousand times. All this she knew, but her manner spoke no word of it.

"We must wait and hope," she said. "The day will teach us to be brave."

The day—yes, Beatrice prayed for the day, though the patient clock told her that there were six hours yet to the dawning, and that they must be hours of uncertainty and of peril. Now that the door of the room was shut she could hear no sound from the floor below, though Venice spoke to her in a message of its music, and many a campanile rang out a chime which seemed to say, "Yesterday, yesterday." For yesterday she had been a free woman; yesterday she had loved; yesterday she had been honoured in Venice. And now the brief hour had written this decree of accusation and of judgment; and she must pay the price that all women pay who have no defence but a woman's impulse.

She tried to sleep, but oblivion would not befriend her; and in her waking dreams she walked and talked with Gaston again, and asked herself once more what was this young soldier's influence over her. Why from the first had she been unable to resist the desire to seek him out and help him—to save him from the danger of his presence in Venice, and, in doing so, perhaps to compromise her own good name and give rein to ready tongues? She

knew that it was because she loved him ; because, for the first time in her young life, she had met a man who could magnetise her will and command her as he might please. Of other explanation none was possible. The very name of Gaston could stir deep emotions in her heart. Courageous as she was, she would have had no shame to surrender all her burdens to such keeping ; and this gentle desire of surrender grew upon her in the hour of separation when she seemed to be forsaken of all.

She loved Gaston—her woman's heart made good excuses for him. Not a second time would she tell herself that he had betrayed her, forgotten, perhaps despised her. And this must be set down in some part to that tenacity of will which refused to admit that her final judgment of man was incorrect. She had believed from the first that if any woman could awaken Gaston de Joyeuse to a real passion, she would have him for the most abject of slaves. And to this idea she clung hopelessly through the long night of waiting. He had left her, dismissed her from his mind—perchance had entered some other house upon the road to Gratz and there found another dupe ; nevertheless, she would be patient through the years, and the after-hope of faith should be her staff. As the dream began to be lost in the blackness of sleep, the bitter thoughts passed away, and she perceived Gaston's image near to her and held up her arms to him and uttered his name, and in his embrace found rest. Then for a full hour she slept. Her eyes were heavy still when Fiametta waked her and bade her listen.

"Madame—for the love of God, do you not hear them?"

Beatrice had not wholly undressed herself, and she sat up upon her bed and pressed the sleep from her eyes. The dawn was breaking in the room, the candles had guttered down in their sockets, and deeper shadows were being gathered up by the glimmering daylight. This, however, was the lesser thing, for the new day sent up to them a loud message from below, whence came the sound of heavy footfalls and sparkling steel and the low cries of men hard pressed. And so it was that Fiametta had come to say, "Do you not hear them?" She herself had been listening for fully five minutes, her hand pressed close to her white chemise as though to still the beatings of her heart. She knew that something dreadful was happening in the house.

"I heard a voice," she said, "and that waked me. Then a gondola rowed up, and some one entered by the garden gate. I think it was Giovanni. They did not speak for a long while afterwards; and then—oh, my God! dear Madame, what is it—what can it mean?"

Beatrice drew her gown about her shoulders and crossed the room with bare feet. She remembered long afterwards how cold the parquet flooring was, and how clumsily she fumbled with the key before she could turn it in the lock. Fiametta, meanwhile, crouched down in the bed-clothes, shuddering and crying like a frightened child. When the door did at last yield to Beatrice's hand, she opened it but an inch or two and so tried to discern what was



A voice in the darkness.

[Page 182]

happening in the hall. But the light refused to help her, and the black shadows of the great well played with her fears. One figure alone could be perceived—it was that of a trooper who lay stone dead by the outer doors with a great wound in his right lung, and the lantern he had been carrying still burning at his side. The yellow glimmer of light seemed to play in horrid mockery upon the black puddle beneath the man's tunic—his eyes were staring upward toward the dome of the hall; he had evidently been struck down by some one who surprised him upon the threshold.

It was such an unlooked-for turn, so wholly fearful and bewildering, that Beatrice remained at her door afraid either to advance or to draw back. And yet it cannot be said that fear predominated in her mind above that strange prompting of hope which whispered the truth—that the dead man had been killed by her friends and that help was at hand. For who else but a friend would have come to the Casa degli Spiriti at a moment when even the least loyal to the Republic must shun her as a leper? She bethought of many names, but none of them save the name of Giovanni Galla satisfied her reason or answered her question. Yes, the girl Fiametta was right after all. Giovanni had returned, but whence? And if it were he, why this perplexing silence, this truce of voices and of arms? Not a living being was to be seen in the hall. She was sure of it. She could not hear so much as the sound of a man breathing, and she said that whoever had killed the Sclavonian trooper had been alarmed at his own act

and had fled the house. Where, then, were Da Ponte and the others? Could it be that he was asleep? The darkness told her nothing. She half shut her door and leaned against it panting. Would the sunlight never fathom that great well of the staircase and declare its mysteries.

"They have killed a soldier, Fiametta," she said, almost breathing the words in her excitement. "Tell me all you have heard. I see no one; we are alone, child. What was it that waked you, then?"

Fiametta stood up and shuddered again when she saw that the door was a little way open still.

"Some one cried out," she said. "It was like an animal's cry. Then I heard the Captain—yes, it was he—I know, but I cannot say it. Giovanni will come back, Madame. If you shut the door we could still hear them. Dear Christ, how frightened I am. Will they kill us, Madame? I am afraid to die—I am such a child. Why should they wish me harm? Oh, Giovanni should speak. Why does he not speak when he knows that we are waiting?"

It was just a child's babble of panic and of the ultimate dread which would remain a supreme memory while Fiametta lived. That open door seemed to point the way to darkness and to terror. She could hear nothing, see nothing; and burying her head, imagination said, "Now they are coming up. Hark, there is a footstep upon the stair!" Beatrice herself was powerless any longer to console her. The blind could not lead the blind—mistress and maid must suffer together to-night.

"If it is Giovanni—if it could be he," Beatrice reiterated as one who did not dare to believe so great a thing; and Fiametta watched her moving from place to place, now toward the window, now toward the bed, and she said to herself again, "All is lost. My lady is afraid."

But it was not fear—at least not fear of things known which wrung from a brave woman these witnesses to her mental distress. Beatrice cared nothing now that Paul da Ponte was in her house and would come to her at dawn for an answer—such an answer as ninety of every hundred women would give willingly under similar circumstance—to the blunt question he had put to her. Relatively, while she pitied the poor fellow who lay dead upon the threshold, the rugged manners, the strong nerves of her age, left her in some way indifferent to death. The torture was that of the darkness and the shadows. Why had the unknown friend left her house? She felt that she could not rest until she knew all; and bidding Fiametta get up, she took one of the silver candelabra in her hands and told the girl to follow her.

"We must know," she said often. "If you are afraid, come but a little way. We must have light. Are you thinking of Paul da Ponte? No; it is I whom he seeks, Fiametta. And I am not afraid—not now—not now!"

She was picking unlighted candles from the glass chandelier in the centre of the room while she spoke, and when she had three in the candelabrum she carried, and Fiametta had put on her gown and

discovered candles in her turn, they went to the door together and passed through it to the balustrade of the great staircase, wherefrom they could look down into the open well, but not to the corridors which its pillars walled. The glow of dawn was fuller and less grey by this time, the shadows had receded somewhat, and the dead man's lantern no longer burned as a taper by the body ; but all else was as it had been—no living thing appeared to move in the hall, and as Beatrice descended the stairs in her white gown, her hair unbound, and the candelabra in her hand, she might have been some figure of imagery appearing from the spirit world. Shining faintly through the gloom, the dancing rays were but wan stars in that great world of twilight. She felt for every step, feared to go on, and yet would not draw back. Who was there, who stood so near to her ? An intuition said, "Gaston, your lover." Her heart beat quick—she called his name aloud—he did not answer her.

Again she advanced a few steps—again she stood to listen. Surely some one was breathing almost upon her cheek. She lifted the light on her hand and perceived the figure of a man. He was Gaston de Ponte, standing all his height behind one of the pillars, and she perceived that the point of his naked sword touched the pavement before him ; but when he saw her, he cried out aloud and sprang into the open—whither another figure followed him—the figure of Gaston de Joyeuse, who had been counting the minutes until the sun should discover his enemy. And now the wan light said "Here." Beatrice did

not know that one brief hour had taught Gaston how to love her.

So do men learn of loss that which gain may never teach them.

Da Ponte had been quick to wheel round toward the west, and he had the light behind him and a full sweep for a heavy rapier. Gaston was armed with a light French sword, but he too had a master's hand; and for many minutes one blade engaged with the other, and not even a twitch of the wrist declared that sense of touch which is the finest in all the swordsman's art. When the disengagement came, the Italian cried out like a drillmaster to a squad "One, two! Now!" and, feinting, he came to the engagement again with a hollow laugh which had been better kept. There was a grace, a pose, an easy play about Gaston's style which invited confidence. He did not attack, made no feint, was a mere defender. For he anticipated the rogue's artifice. No code of honour, written or unwritten, would bind Paul da Ponte. Gaston meant to wait, and while he waited Beatrice stood like a statue, motionless, spellbound, a very type of death. She knew that he loved her—and this man might kill him. The agony tortured her, the day and night seemed to pass, and she was standing there and the blades were crossed; and upon the one side there was the hollow laugh, and, upon the other, the clean, straight limbs of the finest fencer in Bonaparte's army.

From a feint in *octave*, Da Ponte cut over and lingered and was met by a stiff arm and a point

which touched his shoulder and brought a crimson flush upon his vest. He did not laugh now, but bit his thick lips, and for a spell engaged without a new plan of attack. The first plan had taught him to respect this slim, masterful antagonist, and perhaps for the first time in his life he permitted his imagination to play tricks with him, and to ask what were the sensations of a man who had a sword through his heart. There would be an agony of pain, he thought, and then insensibility ; but, said the voice, if it be not through his heart but the lungs, a man may linger some hours and be conscious the while. Many a man had fallen thus before his sword and he had not pitied them at all ; but pity for himself because he said, " I meant to do well by the woman and duty brought me to her house," was as balm to his mind, and he indulged the thought to his danger. At the same time his art did not fail him, and he knew that he was holding his antagonist. Gaston, indeed, had long since been aware of it, for, strong as he was, this burly Italian had the measure of him, and his close confinement in Venice was not in his favour, leaving him, as it did, without those opportunities for physical exercise which he had enjoyed with Bonaparte's army. So he would be niggardly in attack until one supreme opportunity should present itself ; and while every muscle, every nerve, was at its full tension, he forbade himself to think of Beatrice, lest the remembrance should unman him. That she was somewhere near by, that she watched and waited, he quite understood ; and her presence breathed courage upon him. He

would not believe that he could thus betray him.

Da Ponte attacked in *quarte* now, with lightning swiftness and perfect distance, and the flashing point touched Gaston upon the sword arm, and left a long, jagged sear, from which the blood welled slowly. He recovered himself instantly, and met a lunge with so firm a touch that fire flew from the steel and the Italian's wrist trembled like prisoned steel. There was swift attack, new and sure defence ; and stamping, lunging, the sweat pouring from his face, his lips close set, the Italian moved up and down upon the parquet in such a strife that a miracle alone seemed to snatch his antagonist from death. When they halted for very breath, in a tacit truce, Gaston was but an arm's length from Beatrice, who stood as one transfixed, saying, "He will die ; they will kill him." He knew that she was near him, but his eyes never left Da Ponte's face, and he thought that he could interpret every change, even the subtlest, upon that puckered countenance. "He is afraid, Gaston," and then again, "He has forgotten how to fear," or "He is measuring my strength by his own and will tire me," or "He cannot be patient ; his temper will not let him ; and patience is his only chance."

This last was true above them all. Even the stake for which he played could not hold back that impetuosity which had been Da Ponte's rule of life. To go in like a brute beast ; to beat down opposition ; to roar at it lustily ; to crush antagonism beneath the weight of violence, was the only code

of warfare he had ever known ; and now when this clean-limbed figure played with him so cunningly, when the tapered steel stood ever as a great barrier between the man and the desire, patience must soon give place to the deed, opportunity to temper. Baffled and enraged, the Italian got his breath again, and while he said to himself all the time, "Wait, wait," the impulse drove him in spite of it, and he disengaged and lunged in *tierce* with the ferocity of a fencing master. For a full minute on, the blades were darting like flames of silver in the twilight—neither gave way ; each knew that this was the crisis of it ; and calling to their aid every stratagem, every resource of the supreme art, they waited for the arbitration of destiny.

Now, all this had taken place by that pillar of the hall which sheltered Beatrice from the light ; and as the two men moved over toward her in the frenzy of the bout, she retreated yet nearer to the wall, and stood trembling there with Gaston so near to her that her outstretched hand could have touched him. The maid Fiametta had run upstairs again at the first pass, and she, from the stairs head, watched the moving figures and the darting swords. At first Fiametta thought that it was Giovanni returned, and her faith in him said, "He will save us" ; but when she perceived that it was not Giovanni, but the French Count, she lost hope again, and, shivering in the cold air, she turned her face to the wall and would not look. From this attitude she was called by that last supreme attack in which the duellists moved toward my lady ; and thinking less either of

Da Ponte or Gaston than her mistress, she ran a little way down the staircase, and, lifting up the candlestick, she uttered a loud cry, which echoed through the hall and was heard even at the gate. Almost in the same instant some one knocked heavily upon the bronze doors, and believing that here were men to his assistance, Da Ponte took a new stand, and for a spell neither lunged nor fainted. In this brief interval, the girl Fiametta ran to the door and opened it; and discovering a man there, she implored him, for God's sake, to save her mistress. Joseph Villetard, however—for it was he who knocked—pushed her aside roughly, and, making his way into the house, he called loudly "Gaston! Gaston! Where the devil are you, Gaston?"

This brisk appeal, the French tongue, the strange voice, fell like a bolt upon Da Ponte's ear. He half turned his head and took a step backward. Though all befell in the fraction of a second, it seemed to him that a full measure of his life was dealt out to him when the steel touched his soft flesh and was turned in it, and ran like a burning iron to his heart. What an age it rested there and yet left him conscious of strength and vitality and sight and sense—the great hall whence the sunlight chased the shadows, Beatrice pale and shrinking by the wall, Fiametta upon the stairs—the glimmering candles, the cold statuary, the pictures—and this strange face looking so oddly into his own. And then the veil of instant darkness—the shuddering sense of sinking down as into the bowels of the earth—death to

touch his limbs with icy fingers and to shut all from his glazing eyes.

He fell face downwards almost at Beatrice's feet, and the sword bent and broke beneath his huddled body.

But Gaston turned to my lady and caught her swooning in his outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XIV

FLIGHT

SHE had fainted, but the arms which held her were strong and sure, and they lifted her as though she had been a child, and carried her towards the doors of bronze by which Joseph Villertard waited. Cynic always, even in the face of death, the emissary's flinty eyes followed the Count wherever he turned, with a certain ironical satisfaction which seemed to say, "Such is the jest of youth, and you two must play it." His words, however, were brief and quick, and characteristic of one who is surprised by no danger and bears himself more shrewdly for its presence.

"Laugier is there with sixteen men," he said; "we have no time to lose. If I had thought——"

He broke off and peered about the hall. The girl Fiametta, seeing that they were leaving her, besought him pitifully that she might go, but he brushed her aside and would not hear her.

"No, no, girl—one of your sex is quite enough—we shall be twenty in a boat. Besides, there is your

friend Giovanni at the gate. Go out to him and tell them to send Georges and the others. You will be safer with Giovanni."

Fiametta seemed to think so too, and she ran away with a sylph's foot to the water's edge, and to the man whom she believed had saved them that night. When the sailor Georges and two others entered the house, they found Villetard still upon the threshold.

"Take those carrion and throw them into the canal," he said quietly. "Monsieur le Comte will be glad of the half of his sword. Bring it to me. I give you five minutes."

The sailors carried out the bodies with no more concern than they would have lifted their own sea-chests, and, throwing them headlong into the narrow canal which borders upon the garden of the house, they returned to the *riva* and the longboat of which Villetard had spoken. There they seated themselves without a word, while a young officer, in a cocked hat and a gold-laced coat, who had the tiller-lines in his hands, gave the word of command, and the sixteen oars were dipped into the water as one.

"Is your Excellency determined to take this lady to the ship?" Laugier asked, for that was the name of the young officer.

Villetard replied that he was quite determined.

"Then I am not to trouble, whatever happens?"

"Exactly—the responsibility is mine, Captain Laugier."

The Captain screwed up his mouth as one who

feared to say, "I am astonished," and then addressed the men again.

"You hear, my lads—whatever happens we hold on. Give way now. Let his Excellency see what we can do."

The sixteen men bent their backs to the work, and the boat sent up a great wave of water and spray every time the oars were dipped. Though the canal was exceedingly narrow, they had turned their prow northward, thus avoiding the Grand Canal and the Dogana ; and, presently, when they shot out on the broad lagoon, a few strokes brought them opposite the Arsenal.

"Now," said the officer Laugier, "now we shall have the question from the police, Chevalier."

"Go on," said Villetard quietly, "I will answer them."

It was six o'clock of the morning by this time, and while the wind blew cold and shrill across the fretting lagoon, Venice herself caught the wintry sunshine and gave to it beams of gold and silver in return. Her compact shape, dome and tower and palace rising sheer as upon a foundation of crystal rock, was more plainly to be discerned in the morning light when the charcoal fires were but just kindled and no loom of smoke went drifting away like cloud to the distant mountains. Fair indeed, a veritable city of the sea she was at such an hour ; and all the romance of her deed and history seemed to wake to the morning light and be re-written upon her golden cupolas. But of Venice, those in the longboat thought little. Their eyes were turned

towards the open sea where the French sloop of war *Lafayette* was anchored. Thither Villetard carried his friend. This was their haven from the Republic and their enemies.

"Is everything prepared on board? Are you quite ready to sail, Laugier?" Villetard asked when the quays of the Arsenal came into view and a group of men began to gather at the water's edge. Laugier had no doubt of it.

"The lieutenant understands quite well," he said; "he is to weigh anchor and stand in as far as our friends at the Fort permit."

"And that will not be very far," Villetard rejoined. "I know your friends at the Fort, Captain. Their permission will be written on a cannon ball. Is not Dominic Pizzamano in command there? Well, there's a rogue for you. He has threatened to blow us out of the water if we show our noses at the Fort. Some day, Laugier, I shall have the pleasure of hanging that man."

"Then I wish your Excellency would fix it for to-day. You know what I wanted. With three frigates and the sloop we could have held the city for you any time the last fortnight; but you diplomatists are all for expediency. Well, expediency be damned, say I. There would not be so many Frenchmen with holes in their throats if my ship anchored off the Dogana. I am tired of saying it."

"Diplomacy is never tired, my dear Laugier. Besides, you have your consolations. When the General says 'Yes,' we will dine over yonder together, and the Serene Prince will cook the dinner.

Here's a little sum in mathematics, and any child can do it for you. For every Frenchman ten Italians and a Holy Picture. You must make up your mind, Laugier, what you will have. My fancy is for the Virgin and the Child, by Giovanni Bellini, in the Church of San Zaccaria. I shall take it to Paris with me by and by. Let me recommend you to keep an eye on the plate at the Salute; it is exceedingly choice and would look well on your dinner table."

The light banter amused the sailors, who laughed as they rowed. In real truth, however, their talk concerned a matter of some moment both for France and the Republic. Bonaparte had given his solemn pledge that no French ship should pass the Lido, which is the great sandbank dividing the Venetian lagoon from the Adriatic Sea; and this understanding had been faithfully observed until this day. For some time past, however, there were evidences of unrest which greatly disturbed the Venetians; and the manoeuvres of the French squadrons in the Adriatic, the many excuses which sent their sailors into Venice, and their obvious designs upon the Port, could not be regarded without suspicion. Any excuse, however trivial, would serve as a pretext for this new audacity, the people said; and if none agreed with them more cordially than Joseph Villetard, even he had been hard put to it until this moment to state a reason for such an outrage upon neutrality. So it was not a little curious that his friend Gaston, who had pulled him through so many difficulties, should be at hand in

this new perplexity. Villetard, if he said any prayers that morning, joined to them a fervent petition that the police-boat might interfere with him; and to this prayer his patron in duplicity inclined a friendly ear and hastened to abet his treachery. Hardly had the longboat come abreast of the Arsenal, when the well-known black cutter, in which the police patrolled the lagoon, shot out from the low arches by the dockyard and was propelled with splendid strokes towards the flying Frenchmen.

Captain Laugier was the first to see the police-boat, for he stood at the tiller; and he made known his discovery with some jocularly as one well pleased.

"Well, here are the police," he said gaily. "I suppose you have some tale ready for them, Chevalier?"

Villetard stood up, and, shading his eyes with his hands, he took a long look at the Arsenal and its quays. Many of the workmen were gathered there now, and for the moment the common sounds of ringing hammers and clanging iron gave way to a babble of talk and the clamour upon the lagoon. Villetard could see the men running hither and thither in search of some high place whence they could view the chase; and while the big gondola was at first the only craft between the dockyard and the longboat, anon the *barcaroli* began to put out in numbers until there must have been at least a hundred ships in the wake of the pursuit. All this Villetard took in with greedy eyes before he answered Laugier.

"They are very kind to us, Laugier. Please signal the sloop. Since Frenchmen cannot go unmolested in an ally's port, it is necessary for us to be protected. You will fire a gun and let the others know."

Laugier appeared to be a little troubled. He was not altogether sure even yet how far Bonaparte would support him.

"I am understanding that you take the responsibility for all this, Chevalier?" he put it.

"You are understanding, Captain, that if you don't make the signal, I will. Come, what are you thinking about? Did you not read the General's letter?"

"He gave you full authority within the city, but here on the sea——"

"Ha, ha! There's a coward for you!" laughed Villetard, "a man who hesitates when the General is to be served. I shall have to report this, Laugier. You had better be prepared with some good excuse."

Laugier blushed like a girl, for he was no coward, and he determined that some day he would make this crafty schemer eat his words. His own position was one of some delicacy, and, moreover, he enjoyed quite an unfashionable suspicion of honesty, which made him hesitate to look Janus in the face without a qualm.

"You know it's not a question of cowardice," he retorted hotly. "There are some honest men left on the ships if not on land. Give me the musket, Georges; I am about to obey this honourable gentleman."

He fired the musket in the air, this being the signal to his own ship to enter the harbour, and Villetard applauded him with cool effrontery.

"Bravo, my lad. I will tell the General what you did. Let these good fellows remember there is no time to lose. There's a ducat apiece for them when we get aboard."

The men said nothing, for they did not like the way in which their Captain had been addressed; and, beyond this, some excitement of their position was natural, and more than one of them asked what would happen when the police cutter came up. She had been a long way off when they passed the Arsenal, but every stroke now carried her nearer; and the sturdy arms of the Venetian gondolier were more than a match for the rough-and-ready oarsmanship of the man-of-war's men. Proudly, gracefully, like a great black swan upon a still blue lake, the dangerous craft came on, while those on land watched it with gleeful eyes and those in the long-boat bent to their oars until the foam flew like driven rain and every stroke seemed to lift them as upon a wave. Everywhere now, at the gates of the Arsenal, from the windows of the houses, upon the northern Islands, and at Lido's port, this grim regatta delighted or dismayed the amused spectators; nor did those on shore at first perceive what possible hope of escape the Frenchmen might possess. They would never make the sea, men said, because the forts would stop them. Laugier's musket echoing faintly over the waters rang out like a salute too trivial to be heard; but when it was answered by

the deep boom of a gun in the offing, then, and then only, the news ran through Venice as upon a tongue of light—"The French are here; their ships have passed the Castle."

Now, those in the police-boat had been quite unprepared for this new turn, nor were they at first aware that Laugier signalled to a warship. Acting upon their instructions to prevent any Frenchmen leaving Venice unless they could show the necessary passports, they had put out from the dockyard to demand Laugier's papers; and when they came up to the longboat their chief stood up and hailed it bluntly—

"If you please, gentlemen, I must trouble you to halt."

No one paid the slightest attention to him; the two boats raced side by side onward towards the incoming ship. For this the police officer was in no way ready, and he cried a second time—

"Do you hear what I am saying to you? Easy there, my men, I must see your papers."

No one in the longboat appeared to hear him; the oarsmen bent anew to their work; Villetard sat smiling in the stern; Laugier stood at the tiller; Gaston and Beatrice, sheltered by a rude awning for which a ship's tarpaulin served, were in the bows.

When it was quite evident that the captain of the boat meant to hold on his course, the police officer permitted his temper to get the better of him.

"Make fast there!" he cried to one of his subordinates at the bow. "Bring them to, Otto. What the devil do they mean by it, then?"

The subordinate obeyed him with alacrity. He took a rude boathook and tried to catch the side of the longboat. When he had fixed the prongs in the woodwork the two ships were grappled together and went on as one, while the police officer stood up and endeavoured to board the Frenchman.

"Come," he said, "we can have no nonsense here. I must see your papers, gentlemen. If they are all right, you will be allowed to proceed. Why do you give me this trouble?"

He was midway between the two boats as he spoke, and in another instant would have been at Villetard's side; but the Chevalier, stretching out a hand as though to help him, suddenly jerked him backward and threw him into the lagoon. At the same moment Laugier drew a pistol from his belt and shot the subordinate through the arm. The fellow gave a loud cry and let go his hold, and the longboat bounded on again towards the haven of the ship.

So concerned were those upon the police-boat for the safety of their chief that no man bethought him of answering the Frenchman's audacity, or of firing upon the retreating crew. Those who witnessed the scene from the shore declared that it all happened so suddenly and took a new shape with so little warning, that they were quite unaware of disaster until the longboat was well under the shelter of the sloop's guns and a cutter had put off to its assistance. When they did understand, messengers were dispatched in haste to the Ducal Palace, and while the press of boats increased momentarily about the

Dogana and the Arsenal, the alarm bells sounded the tocsin from many a steeple, and the whole city awoke at last to the grim truth—that the French were in the lagoon and had passed the Lido.

It was well enough to prate of outrage and infamy, of Bonaparte's broken pledges, and the effrontery of his emissary, Villetard. This any gossip could do—but that which brought every senator pell mell to the Palace, called the Doge from St. Mark's, and set the alarm bells ringing, was the fact that the French flag flew before the Castle of St. Andrew's, and that the French admiral was sailing towards the very heart of Venice. Should he be permitted to advance, or should he be resisted? Lorenzo, my Lord of Brescia, and the "forwards" were all for hostility. They carried their point about the time when the longboat came riding to the war-sloop's side, and Joseph Villetard declared that all danger was at an end.

The French ship must be sunk. The Doge bade them carry the order with all speed to the commander of the Fort. The hour for Bonaparte's trifling was gone by, and Venice at last would speak for herself.

CHAPTER XV

THE DEATH OF LAUGIER

WHEN Gaston carried Beatrice from her own house to the longboat, she was quite insensible to all that happened about her, nor did she wholly recover consciousness until they lifted her on board the sloop of war, and Villetard commanded them to prepare a cabin for her. The long night, with all its changing scenes of doubt and fear, had so wrought upon her endurance that, when she succumbed, it was almost in a swoon of death ; and from this nothing but youth and the devotion of a lover restored her. In the cabins of the *Lafayette*, the surgeon Maurice attended her with a gallant care which satisfied even the Count's anxieties ; and whether they watched and waited about her bed indifferent to any desire but that of her safety. Unable at the moment to say how this flight would influence her life, Gaston, nevertheless, realised that she was leaving a home and city dear to her, forfeiting for ever, it might be, her good name and the position her talents had won for her in Venice, and

going out at the bidding of destiny to some new way of life which must be hazardous for them both. That Venice would call her "traitress" he knew full well; and yet Venice had numbered no citizen more faithful. Her very zeal had led her to this *cul-de-sac* of intrigue—so that, while her own people said that she had betrayed them, the French believed her to be the enemy of their countrymen—even the mistress of assassins. Neither within the Italian lines nor without would she find a safe refuge; and considerable as was Gaston's influence with Bonaparte, he doubted his ability to protect her. The future was dark, indeed, for them both.

Such foreboding moments kept the Count in her cabin, even when the surgeon Maurice declared that the immediate danger was over and that she must sleep. Narrow and close the place was, and ill-lighted by a crazy oil lamp swinging in gimbals from its ceiling; but they had made up an officer's bunk for Beatrice, and she now lay there, so still and white that the light seemed to fall upon a figure of death. Not much more than a child in years, despite her wisdom and achievement, rest emphasised her gifts of youth and presented them in a phase most attractive—for, as she lay, her hair tumbled like a fringe of gold upon the white pillow, the long eyelashes were black upon the pallid cheek, and her slight figure outlined in the fulness of its youth and symmetry. The terror, the hazard of the pitiless night, were done with now, and though she must awake anon to the truth, the man she loved would be at her side to say, "We will face

it together." Gaston could not yet understand how a few short hours had stripped his mind of those vain sophisms with which he had once justified his treatment of this generous woman ; but he asked their service no longer, and he did not hide it from himself that he had now no hope of life which did not begin and end with her.

And he was carrying her from Venice, her home, whither and to what end ?

Even the optimism of Gaston de Joyeuse could not answer that question. Enough for the moment that he watched by her, could touch her hand and say that she lived. For that which was happening on the deck above he cared not at all, since the anchor was weighed and the sloop stood out toward the Adriatic and their freedom. Gaston could hear the heavy tread of seamen upon the deck, and he knew that arms were being served out to the men ; but this he imagined to be a precautionary measure ; and when Villetard came down to the cabin a little while afterwards, he did not question him about it. Indeed, Joseph Villetard could never rest for many minutes together in any one place ; and he merely broke in to change a pleasant word with his friend, as one who snatches opportunity at a hazard.

"Ha, *mon vieux*, is she better, then ?"

"I think so, Joseph ; she is sleeping. Come in and tell me what you think."

The Chevalier entered on tiptoe and took a hasty glance at the prone figure.

"I congratulate you, Gaston ; she is really a beautiful woman. Well, I'm afraid those fellows

will wake her up—but we shall soon be out of it," he added thoughtfully, "and then to the General and the camp, my boy."

Gaston said nothing, though he continued to watch Beatrice with affectionate anxiety; Villetard, turning to the door, nodded his head at the pleasure his own thoughts gave him.

"This Laugier is the devil on board his own ship," he remarked. "I believe he wants to fire upon the Fort."

"But that would be against the treaty, Joseph."

"Oh—ah—yes; but then, you see, my dear Gaston, so much has happened against the treaty. These people fire upon the ships of a friendly nation and expect us to take off our hats to them. Well, we shall do it, but we can still hold a torch in the other. Oh yes, the General is not so very fond of treaties himself—and, there you see it, he trusts to my discretion. I am going to do what is right, Gaston."

"Wonderful, my dear Villetard—perfectly wonderful. I will make a note of it in my diary. Joseph has done what is right. Are you sure that the General will like it?"

"I shall forget, perhaps, to ask his opinion. . . . Take care of the lady, for she is going to be worth a great deal of money to us."

"Then go upstairs and tell those noisy fellows to keep their dancing for to-morrow. Why are they playing with thunderbolts, Villetard?"

"Because there is about to be a storm, my dear Count."

He went up to the deck, chuckling softly at his own humour ; and finding Laugier upon the poop, he stood with him to watch the busy movements of the crew and the execution of that daring manœuvre in which it was then engaged. The scene was the Eastern lagoon of Venice, where nothing but a narrow bank of sand divides the still water of the lake from the surging tides of the Adriatic ; where, upon the one side you have the rippling grace of mere and river, and the city towering up in a haze of gold above them ; and upon the other the wall of silver foam, and the deep blue hearts of crested waves, and the distant horizon sentinelled by ships. Through this bank of sand, which has stood as a rampart to Venice since man can remember, there are five ports or openings, each guarded by its castle or fort ; and that particular port which Laugier had entered was the one dominated by the substantial castle of St. Andrews, and accounted the best defended of them all. The French commander, however, had so convinced himself that the temporisers and timids and "barter-with-hims," and "put-it-offs" in the Senate would never screw up their courage so far as to fire upon him, that he drew close in toward the Fort without scruple, and even dipped his flag in a mock salute—which the Commander of the Castle disdained to answer. Such apparent insult amused the French sailors very much, and they grouped themselves together at the bulwarks to exchange a jest with old "God save us to-morrow," as they had already come to call Dominic Pizzamano, the officer in question. This was the moment when

Villetard climbed up toward the poop and greeted Laugier.

"Well, Captain, how goes it, then?"

"It hardly goes at all, Chevalier. We have no wind, as you see."

"Ha, then you must buy a flute. What are they doing over yonder? Why is there no one at the Fort?"

"They are at their prayers, Chevalier—praying for the General's death. Seriously, though, I believe they mean mischief."

"They have meant it for the past six months. A man who means mischief is easily dealt with if he be taken in time. What are you going to do, Laugier?"

"I am going to salute them again. If they are rude, it is not my fault. Those guns, certainly, are not pretty. I hope there is nothing in them."

"As empty as the heads of their owners, eh? Well, it is certainly annoying that we have not a wind. I should like to see your skill, Laugier."

"In running away from them?"

"Exactly. He is a wise man who knows when to run away. They could sink this ship at the first attempt. For my part I would prefer it afloat."

"Ha, here's a coward for you," said Laugier, flinging back the words addressed to him in the longboat—but he was really very good tempered, and his laugh had an honest ring. Villetard, too, was in no way disturbed. He had learned long since that it does not matter at all what men call you when your own skin is likely to be hurt.

"Oh, I agree, I agree," he exclaimed affably ; "a coward who would save one of the General's ships," and then breaking off with a start he could not control, he added, "A royal salute, I think, Laugier."

The young Captain, however, had eyes only for the stunted, dangerous, bull-necked fort, whence a puff of smoke had come and a rolling report which went gambolling over the waters like the thunder of a volcano. The commander of St. Andrew's Castle was summoning the war-sloop to lay to. Laugier liked the sound of it. He gave an order to the lieutenant at his side, and he in turn to an officer upon the lower deck who commanded the men heartily to stand to the guns. It was clear that any moment might bring the crisis.

Villetard was decidedly of this opinion. He crossed the poop and looked about him with a searching, anxious glance. And what he saw was this, as his own words testify :—

The great lake about the city of Venice ; and the city herself shrouded in a golden mist upon the western horizon ; gondolas, fishing boats with their picturesque lateen sails, odd sailing ships from Greece and the Levant, cutters, pinnaces, all jostling together at the narrow entrance to the lake and hurrying from the range of the Castle guns. Right ahead, not a quarter of a mile away, was the long sandbank dividing the lagoon from the sea ; and in this bank the narrow opening by which the sea was gained. Here stood the Castle, turning

one face to the Adriatic, the other toward Venice ; and having a considerable armament of guns, so that those upon the deck of the sloop could look into the black mouths of nearly thirty cannon, and speculate as much as they pleased upon their quality and purpose. The boundaries of the scene were : upon the south the spires and roofs of Chioggia ; upon the west the city of Venice ; upon the north the mountains and the hovering mists ; upon the east the blue horizon and the cloudless arc of the clear blue sky.

Such was the scene when a shot was fired at the *Lafayette*, and the men stood to the guns and answered the summons with a ringing cheer.

"What are you going to do, Laugier ? That fellow evidently means to be troublesome," said Villetard when the report of the gun had died away and only the cloud of white smoke drifted across the lagoon. Laugier rejoined immediately—

"I am going to rejoice with them, Chevalier. We must not forget our good manners. Smoke for smoke—well, there it goes. Thrice repeated and we shall have the squadrons to our aid. I am thinking entirely of your comfort, Villetard."

One of the little brass cannon amidships, firing in the direction of the Fort, deprived the Chevalier of any further pleasure of sarcasm ; and being a person of delicate nerves and fine sensibility, he put his fingers into his ears while the salute was twice repeated. So far the engagement had been worthy of Venice's later tradition, conducted with amiable gentility and entirely harmless. No one, indeed,

was more surprised than Laugier himself when those at the Fort so misunderstood his salute that the gunners answered it with a round shot aimed plump at the *Lafayette*, and missing its mark by inches. The cannon ball fell with an ugly splash into the lagoon, and the circling ripples widened and lingered.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Ville-tard, with just a suspicion of a quaver in his voice.

"Oh," exclaimed Laugier jauntily, "I call it an Easter egg, Chevalier, hatched some six weeks before its time. We cannot be behindhand in civility, eh? Well, here goes for the devils," and to the gunners he cried, "Make ready, my lads, and let them see what you can do. Monsieur Jacquemard, please to stand by. — I am quite ready."

Lieutenant Jacquemard was exceedingly pleased to receive the Captain's order, and he and the three gunners with him began to play with the cannon as a child plays with a toy. While one of them squabbed it out with the brush, another carried powder, a third the round shot; Jacquemard himself had a torch in his hand, and he trained the gun upon the Fort.

"Shall we fire, sir!" he asked, looking up at Laugier.

"Immediately," said the Captain, "and mind you shoot straight."

Jacquemard saluted and put the torch to the touch-hole, while the men stood back and some held their fingers in their ears. There was a little splutter

of powder, and then a crashing report, while the cannon recoiled half across the deck, and a great cloud of sulphurous smoke blotted out the hither sea from observation. When the cloud had died away those on the poop of the *Lafayette* could plainly see a great breach in the masonry of the Fort, while the stonework still crumbled and rolled down into the sea. Such a success pleased Laugier, and he encouraged the men to try again.

"There's one for old 'God save us to-morrow,'" he ejaculated, and then, "Well done, Monsieur Jacquemard. I think we might repeat that."

Monsieur Jacquemard was about to say something in reply, proving that he, too, imagined this to be little better than a pleasantry played by two who cared little for the game, when the Fort suddenly opened such a rattling musketry fire upon the sloop that for an instant lead seemed to hail upon her decks. One of the gunners, he who held the brush, was shot through the heart at the first volley; and he went reeling across to the opposite bulwarks like a man struck with giddiness and unable to direct his steps. At the bows three seamen fell in a heap, but one of them sat up and clutched at the boards with his hands. Jacquemard, the lieutenant, had a bullet through his arm, and he stood quite still covering the wound with a nervous hand.

It has been said that Laugier and Villetard upon the poop owed their safety to Pizzamano's reluctance to fire at French officers; but unharmed assuredly they were, though one of them had a very white face and went down upon the deck on all

fours, caring nothing whatever for any account that might be given of him. Villetard, indeed, made no bones about it. He did not want any bill to be sent by Bonaparte on his account.

"Don't expose yourself, man," he cried out to Laugier as he climbed down the ladder. "What's the good of it? Come down at once," and then he asked, letting all appearance go, "Is the squadron coming in? Do you see it, Laugier?"

Laugier, thus addressed, advanced to the rail of the poop and looked down upon the Chevalier with some just contempt.

"Ho, here's a coward for you!" he cried triumphantly. "Why don't you join the ladies, Chevalier? Tell Madame la Marquise that we are anticipating Ascension. She will look after you, man—and, Villetard, please be good enough to whistle for the wind."

Laugier, truly, was a fine figure of a fellow with his cocked hat set impudently on his boyish forehead, and his smart blue coat, and his spotless white gloves, and the sword at his belt, and the easy manner of one who has looked upon death many a day and grown indifferent to the spectacle. The swift danger merely nerved him to great coolness and that sure judgment which the sea demands of its masters. One swift survey showed him how perilous the position of the sloop was; it enabled him also to estimate correctly that play of circumstance which must decide the engagement. It all depended, he imagined, upon his allies, the French squadron now vainly trying to make the harbour.

Five good frigates were over there, and the gun-boat, *Le Libérateur de l'Italie*, ahead of them all. Could these vessels so manœuvre that the Fort came within range of their heavy guns, the story would soon be told, he said ; but the wind had died away until it was scarcely a catpaw, and the six boats, one in the lagoon and five in the Adriatic, were as hopelessly apart as though they sailed on different oceans. Laugier would have given the half of his fortune for just one squall to carry him to Lido's gate ; but perceiving that wishes went for little, he tried to rally his men to face the hail of shot which the Fort now rained upon them. Such a task was beyond even his powers, nor was it lack of courage that made it so. They were barely a hundred yards from the terrible guns by this time, and the crouching musketeers fired pell mell from the battlements upon the bloody decks. A round shot struck the mainmast and brought it down headlong, pinning three gallant fellows beneath it, and rendering the deck impassable. Groans and cries and curses were mingled with the loud shouts of officers and the rolling thunder of the musketry. Helpless and uncontrollable, the sloop drifted slowly towards the sandbank near the harbour's mouth ; and the imperturbable Laugier could do nothing but pace the quarter-deck mathematically as a man who is counting the steps which lie between him and the end of his fortunes.

"What is it, Jacquemard ?" he cried often. "Why do you not fire at them ?"—to whom Jacquemard replied, "We shall be ready presently,

sir"—always that, they would be ready presently, when the terror-stricken carpenters had hacked away the lumbering spars, and the choked decks were free of the dead men. "Presently," in this case, was a long way off.

Joseph Villetard, rather the victim of discretion than a coward, had seated himself upon a barrel at the lee side of the companion hatch, and sheltered there from the musketry, he contrived to get a glimpse of that which was passing about him; and he was the first to spy out the drifting vanguard of the squadrons and to pass on the good news to the captain.

"They are sending the pinnace, Laugier," he shouted up; "look for yourself. That's good, isn't it? Do you think they can help us? Well, it is time they came."

Laugier had forgotten all about the squadron in his anxiety to clear the decks, but he put his spy-glass to his eye when Villetard addressed him, and said that it was true.

"Yes," he cried, "it is as you say. Detourville sends us the pinnace. He is a good fellow, but I don't think it is much use."

Villetard made no reply, but crouching close to the hatch, he watched the new assault with greedy eyes. It was quite true that the first of the warships, *Le Libérateur de l'Italie*, had put off the pinnace to the rescue of the sloop; and this boat, manned by thirty stout seamen with naked cutlasses in their hands, came on rapidly towards the harbour, encouraged by the loud shouts of their comrades

on both sides. Their purpose was to gain the shore and to carry the landworks by storm ; but in this, as Laugier before them, they had altogether underrated the strength of the fortress, and they were still some sixty yards from the beach, when a round shot struck the pinnace full amidships, and shattered her as though she had been cut by a mighty axe. In the same instant the cheers gave place to a loud cry of woe, and the sea became black with the figures of drowning men.

"I am sorry for Detourville," Laugier said almost to himself, as he turned from the spectacle with a shrug of his honest shoulders. His countryman's deed, gallantly rash, had for the time being diverted the storm of shot from the sloop in the lagoon to the warships beyond the harbour ; but hardly was the pinnace sunk before the torrent of lead struck the heaving boat once more, and enveloped her in a sheet of leaping flame and flying balls. Not a man but Laugier now stood up on the deck of the *Lafayette*. Some lying down, some covering gaping wounds, some stark dead, some crawling on their hands and knees towards the water kegs, the brave fellows gave way before this devouring fire, and asked, in God's name, why they could not die. It were as though the Commander of the Fort would disregard all the laws of war, and so drive the beaten ship that no soul might live upon her decks. That Laugier, the ever smiling, undaunted officer, should still pace the quarter-deck unafraid, was the miracle of the day. He bore a charmed life, men said. The bullets whistled about him, the spars above

were splintered and carried away, the round shots went spuming into the sea, and yet he was not done with. Nor did he owe anything now to Italian timidity or the Commander's scruples. "Shoot me that fellow down," Pizzamano cried to his gunners, as the pinnacle was sunk and all disguise abandoned. He cursed them for poltroons when none obeyed him. He would have carried it to the pitiless extremity and murdered every man aboard had not Venice herself interposed dramatically even at this eleventh hour.

Yes, such grace as the sinking sloop found, she owed to the temporisers and timids, and "barter-with-hims," and "put-it-offs," who had wrangled at the Palace all the morning, and chosen a course when choice itself was mischief. Through the long debate the voice of Lorenzo, Lord of Brescia, had been lifted vainly to demand the life of every Frenchman in the city and a resolute campaign upon Terra Firma. But no one listened to my Lord now; the name of Bonaparte stilled every tongue. When the news came that Dominico Pizzamano was firing upon the French sloop, even the bravest doubted his wisdom. All agreed that Bonaparte would exact a bitter vengeance; there was no vote against the immediate cessation of hostilities; and so the message went out swiftly in the police-boat, and old Pizzamano called his gunners off with tears in his eyes and an oath upon his lips.

The cannon ceased firing, all but one, trained and laid by the finger of ironic destiny. This cannon a

mad gunner fired despite the order, and the ball hurtled across the sea, and laughing at the boast "A miracle," it struck Laugier as he paced the quarter-deck, and stretched him dead upon the poop of that ship he would have defended so gallantly.

CHAPTER XVI

FAREWELL

BEATRICE said farewell to Venice on the morning of the following day, when the French frigate *Mirabeau* weighed anchor at noon and set sail for the harbour of Chioggia. She, with such others as were saved from the sinking sloop, had been transferred after the engagement to the shelter of the flagship, where the admiral's cabin was made ready for her; and she was welcomed with that delicate courtesy of which the French are ever the masters. None misunderstood her presence with the fleet nor the irony of those events which banished from the city one of the wisest and most faithful of the Councillors; and if the promises of a return were freely made, no man uttered them with more conviction than Count Gaston. He was ever at her side now, testifying by his acts that he understood her at last, and would make amends. But of his own devotion he said nothing, and he would neither advise nor compel her, leaving to the eloquent Villetard the declaration of that course which prudence demanded them to follow.

Joseph Villetard, indeed, offered to the young Marquise a homage which was insatiable. The first to remember her needs, he also was the first to provide for them ; and the angry letter which he had addressed to the Senate at the moment of the armistice demanded, first of all, full liberty for her afloat and ashore, the security of her house and property, and the presence of her servants on board the frigate.

"In the name of my master, General Bonaparte, I warn you," he had said, "that this lady is henceforth under the protection of France, and that any measures which may be taken against her will be regarded as hostile to my Government and its emissaries." To give them their due, the Senators hastened to comply, grovelling in panic and knee-deep in perplexity. A seal was instantly put upon the bronze doors of the Casa degli Spiriti ; the servants, Giovanni Galla and Fiametta, were rowed out in the police-boat to service upon the frigate—the Serene Prince himself craved leave to inform the Chevalier, Joseph Villetard, that should Madame la Marquise deign to re-enter the city, her reception should be that accorded to great citizens. This letter Villetard carried to Beatrice's cabin without delay, and, entering triumphantly, he began to hint at that course of action which he desired my lady to pursue.

How little she knew what days of fear and doubt and peril such a course must cost her.

"Madame," he said, pushing the letter across to her and appealing to Gaston at her side for the

approval he merited—"Madame, the end, you see, is better than the beginning—observe to what depths pusillanimity can sink! You have only to lift your hand and these people will eat dirt. It is their proper diet—they thrive upon it."

Beatrice laughed in spite of herself and stretched out her hand for the letter. The cabin in which she sat had all that elegance of appointment to which French officers were accustomed—couches covered in silk, cupboards of fine teak, gilded handles, mirrors and a swinging lamp of silver. At the moment when Villetard entered, Beatrice wrote at the centre table, while Gaston, resting indolently upon the sofa, watched every movement of her shapely head, and fell to wondering what thoughts so animated the eloquent eyes. When she looked up to answer Villetard, her face was quite in repose again. This fulsome incompetency could not fail to sadden her.

"Thank you, Chevalier," she rejoined with dignity, "but you would be the last to advise me to answer this."

"The very last Madame," said Villetard, as he seated himself in the chair opposite to her. "I have already told you that Venice is no longer a desirable place for the friends of your Republic. As a patriot you are one of them. Imagine what would befall you when Bonaparte enters the city—impossible to think of it."

He turned to Gaston and appealed to him.

"What do you say, Count? What do you advise Madame to do?"

John answered a little dolefully—

"I advise her to be guided by her own wisdom. Undoubtedly," he added, "it would be dangerous for her to return. But there she is not a French woman."

Beatrice thanked him with her eyes.

"No," she said emphatically, "to my life's end I remain Beatrice of Venice, Count."

"I understand that, Marquise," whispered Villetard quietly; "because you are Beatrice of Venice you will consider how far Venice is to be helped or injured by your action upon Terra Firma."

"Meaning, Chevalier, that I am to be my country's advocate with Bonaparte."

"Nothing less, dear lady. The General is very much open to such argument, believe me. He will certainly receive you favourably."

"When I ask him to spare this city, which has murdered his ambassadors?"

"Not quite that, Marquise—there are alternatives. He might temporise, for instance. It would be much to have Venice definitely with us."

"She being so greatly against you that at the first sound of cannon her statesmen cry, 'Hold, enough!'"

"That is merely a phase of it—there is still your army on Terra Firma and six thousand Sclavonians in the camp here. Why should these not join the General in his attempt to secure peace for Italy? If you believe that there is no real hostility to France in the hearts of your people, and that the

Senate does not truly represent them, General Bonaparte would be very glad to hear it."

Beatrice shook her head slowly.

"No," she said slowly, "I do not believe it, Chevalier. Every Venetian thinks as I think, that the day which sent your countrymen out of Italy would be the happiest in our history. If I go to General Bonaparte it will be as the advocate of a just cause. I cannot go otherwise—nothing but sincerity will help us. You are as well aware of that as I, Monsieur Villetard. The cause is lost, but the justice of it remains—I have no other message for your General."

"He will ask no other, Marquise. I will see to it that you are not misrepresented. Shall we say that you start for Verona to-night? The Count, I am sure, is at your service. Is it not so, Gaston—Verona or Paris, it doesn't matter to you, I suppose? Well, there are hussars at Padua, and I will command an escort—let us say at six o'clock."

Beatrice did not protest, but her eyes avoided her lover's; while as for the Count, his heart beat so fast that he breathed a long breath before he dared to speak.

"Very well," was his answer, "at six o'clock I will be ready, Chevalier."

And then he asked—

"At what time do we sail? Is the anchor up?"

"You are about to hear the chantey," Villetard replied, and, suggestively, he went on, "Perhaps

Madame Beatrice would like to see the men at work. It is very fresh on deck to-day."

Beatrice rose without a word, and, pinning a black mantilla about her shoulders with a diamond buckle, she followed Gaston to the decks above. The desire to bid the city of her childhood a long farewell came as an impulse which all her wisdom could not resist. None could deceive her, no promise could make that farewell less bitter nor the finality of it less evident. By her own act, out of her desire in the first instance to save the city from its crimes, there had come to her this day of exile and of flight. Nevermore, she thought, would Venice be a home to her. And every stone of it was dear beyond price; every landmark could speak of some day of her childhood when all the world had been the garden of her romance, and the secrets of life and love and marriage were the great *terra incognita* beyond the gates. Yes, she believed that she would see Venice no more; but the tears of anguish and the heart of the woman spoke to the heart of the child, and said "Well done."

Venice lay in the haze of a spring noon which might have been the twin sister of summer but for the violets in her hair and the cool breezes blowing upon her ruddy cheek. Far to the north the snow-caps of the Venetian Alps dominated a fertile scene of wooded plain and vine-clad heights. A deep purple horizon to the south marked Chioggia and the islands—but the city herself lay in sunny indolence, a curving outline of stately palaces and

shimmering cupolas and lofty domes rising sheer from the limpid blue waters. Viewed far off from the confines of the Adriatic, men might have said that her ancient glory remained to her, that she was still the mistress of the seas and the doughty champion of the old-time liberty. But none of those upon the deck of the French frigate so deceived themselves or permitted the illusion. Each, in his turn, had asked something of Venice and been denied. Their thoughts were as different as their characters.

And first of the subtle, far-seeing Villetard, what was his argument as he leaned upon the bulwarks of the good ship *Mirabeau* and nodded his head in time to the merry chantey which honest seamen lifted. Said he, "Here's the wife of a Frenchman going to tell the General that she is an exile from Venice because she advised her countrymen to cease cutting the throats of my countrymen. She is clever, accomplished, pretty. Bonaparte is just the man to twist her round his little finger. He will make these Venetian poltroons pay heavily for their treatment of her. The Directory in Paris will hear that he is protecting Frenchwomen, and will applaud him. True, my friend Gaston is a little in the way, and may be inconvenient. But I shall advise the General of that, and he will manage it cleverly. "Yes," he concluded, "we must separate these love-birds without any loss of time, or there will be the devil to pay."

And my lady Beatrice? She had but one thought—her home, her country. Could any influence of

hers turn aside the doom which Venice had invited, a doom which now closed so swiftly about her? Beatrice knew that her lover stood at her side; and while she trembled sometimes lest her will should surrender to his in the intimacy of those hours they must pass upon the road to Verona, she would not think of it but in nobility of purpose, and desire found the solace of farewell.

A third remained, Gaston de Joyeuse, the agent of her misfortunes and the friend of her exile. Had he confessed in those moments of silent meditation, it would have been to one desire of life, to one purpose which obliterated all other aspirations and left him poor in the expression of his love. The night had taught him to worship this noble woman with all the generosity of affection which her self-sacrifice had earned. For there had been an hour in the silence of the night when Gaston awoke to know that he was alone; that something, without which life had no meaning, had been taken from him—awoke to worship an image he had put away of his own will, and to understand that the love and the fidelity and the companionship of one sweet woman have no substitute in all the gamut of human happiness. He believed, then, that he had looked upon her face for the last time, and when they called him to her side, out of the darkness to the light of her forgiveness, he could not imagine that this was not some new trick of his destiny. But the daylight answered "No; your road is her road, your fortune her fortune, as it is decreed." And he swore that it should be so, and that in darkness and in

light he would go with her to that unknown land of rest and their desire.

And so the good ship *Mirabeau* set sail upon that sunny morning, and, bending to a kindly wind, she shut the picture from their eyes, and Venice became but a golden cloud upon a far horizon.

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PART II.—*VERONA*

CHAPTER XVII

UPON THE ROAD TO PADUA

THEY were upon the road to Padua at six o'clock that night, and in spite of their fatigue they pushed on resolutely towards the camp at Bovoleta and the French troops they expected to find there. The clemency of the Senate and its panic had permitted Joseph Villetard to obtain from the Casa degli Spiriti many things of which Beatrice stood in need ; but particularly money and such clothes as might serve her upon her journey. He himself took all other burdens upon his far from substantial shoulders, and his agents upon Terra Firma bought horses for the party, and such escort as could be had. His desire that there should be no delay was in a measure unselfish if at the same time it furthered his own ends. This splendid Frenchwoman, as he would call Beatrice de St. Remy, was just a type after his own heart. They would have made a fine pair, he thought, and he envied that lucky fellow Gaston.

"You will push straight on until you find the

General," he said at parting. "You cannot lose your way—it is as though a stranger in Paris asked for Notre Dame. Tell him your story and leave the rest to circumstance."

But to Beatrice alone he said—

"Beware of the General—he will make love to you ; it is his only recreation."

And so they set off, over the interminable marshes and upward toward the hills about Padua. There were twelve of the company, which included eight troopers who had been with the outposts and were detached by Villetard for this service ; Giovanni Galla and Fiametta, the maid, came after with other troopers and the mules for the baggage. For quite a long while Beatrice and Gaston rode side by side in silence ; but as the shadows of night began to fall and the soldiers to lag behind them, Beatrice put a question to her companion, and he drove his horse close to her side that he might answer it.

"How did you come to my house yesterday, Gaston—who sent you ?"

"Your young man, Giovanni. I was with Villetard, you know, at an old house upon the Giudecca. Giovanni told me what was happening—I should never have left you, Beatrice. I know that now."

"And does sadness stalk so close upon the heels of discovery that you are silent from Chioggia ?" she asked, but not unkindly.

"No," he said ; "it is not that. I have been wondering how I shall make you understand. There are moments when a man can say so little.

This is one of them. My heart is full of words. I cannot speak. Beatrice, I broke faith with you, but not of my intention. You do not charge me with it, but I know that you are thinking of it. Perhaps you say that you will never trust me again."

"Gaston, I do not say it. If you broke faith with me, you had what you thought a good excuse. I wish to hear it—that you keep nothing from me. It will be better for both of us in the end."

Her answer pleased him, and with a soldier's blunt tongue he tried to express his mistake and his contrition. He believed that Bonaparte knew of his safety—Villetard had told him so. He did not think that Villetard wished to do her an injury; but, after all, he was a statesman, and the stake for which he played was his country's honour. They might never trust such a man as Villetard wholly even now upon the road to Padua; "but," he went on, "at least I have you by my side, and I will forgive him for that." Her silence encouraging him, he tried to tell her of the night when first he had known that he loved her.

"I went away," he said, "because I believed my duty to Bonaparte called me. When we were together I did not understand, Beatrice. The days were all sunshine. I used to wake in the morning and listen for your footstep in the garden. There was not a flower there which did not say 'Beatrice' to me. Even when we were apart I could look at the clock and say, 'She will come back in one hour or in two.' Life without you was never contemplated. I believed that destiny had not brought us

together for nothing—and yet, I say it to you without shame, I was ignorant of my love for you. You know my career ; it has not been without such affection for women as my profession and my inclination taught me. I went away from the Casa degli Spiriti as I had gone from many houses, with such tenderness toward you and the belief that fate might bring us together again. But how I loved you, why I loved you, I was to learn afterwards. Yes, I began to understand then. The silence of the house was my master. The night set up your image for me ; but I knew that I was alone. Ah, that loneliness ! The long hours of waiting for the sunshine which would never come again—the day without the voice, the flowers which had no meaning. And then the truth, which said, ‘It was your own act—you had the gift and rejected it.’ Yes, I learned the lesson Beatrice. It seemed to come like some message of music. I remember how I got up from my bed and listened to the bells. That night my own heart spoke to me. The world was all new in that instant. I saw a goal of life and tried to reach it. And I suffered as men suffer in such hours—for I had broken faith, and my conscience said, ‘She will not forgive ; she cannot.’ It was then that Giovanni found me, and I went with him. Do you know, my comrade, that a man never realises how much a woman means to him until he hears that another man is at her side. Good God ! if we had crossed oceans the voyage were more tolerable than that journey to your house. And all the time I was saying, ‘He is there, he is persecuting

her ; I may be too late.' Giovanni says that I asked him a thousand questions. Well, it may have been. But I can see the light beyond the doors now, and the figure on the stairs—yes, and I shall live through that night a thousand times, and it will always end with you. There's my story, Beatrice—I keep nothing back ; no, the time has gone for that. We must begin again, you and I—from the same book but a different page of it. Ah, my comrade, if your wish were mine how soon it were done."

He looked at her ardently, as though waiting for her to say, "Yes, it is my wish"; but Beatrice had turned her face away, and nothing but the scarlet flush upon the cheek was visible to him. The truth was that a man so boyishly simple as Gaston de Joyeuse had never deceived her for a single day. She knew that Villetard had led him as he pleased ; she knew that he was ignorant of his love for her when he quitted her house ; but the naïve confession delighted her as the story of a man's love must ever delight and fascinate a woman. Gaston, she said, had learned his lesson indeed, but the road to Padua was no place for the repetition of it. They had both so much to do, the future was so doubtful, the present in its way so terrible that she rested content to hold this confession safe in her heart but not to answer it.

"Yes," she said at length, "we turn a new page, but we must not read only of ourselves there, Gaston. You and I stand further apart than ever we have stood in our lives before. Oh, think of it

—a woman that is an exile from her own country, and you the soldier of her enemies. What miracle can send these two through life together? Is it not a dream of folly which the sunshine laughs at? Your comrade, if you will—your friend always; but, Gaston, for the rest, just companions upon the road we know not whither. Yes, it must be that—I dare not say that it shall be different. If the day should come when the woman of Venice has any right to answer you otherwise, she will do so. But to-night she says ‘Forget.’ It is wiser so—yes, Gaston, wiser so.”

She held out her hand to him, and he put it to his lips almost with the awe of a boy who has never touched a woman’s hand before. The setting sun spreading its shafts of mellow radiance across the deserted plain framed the girlish face in a hood of gold and showed him all its beauty. Gaston knew that she had answered him, but his wit could not measure the meaning of her promise. At Padua, at Verona, in the unknown service awaiting him, what fortune would bring him to her side again? And was not the whole world before them? Could they not, if such had been their pleasure, turn aside at any cross-road and quit this scene of desolation and of war? The vision of freedom melted away when he regarded Beatrice’s stern, set face. He understood that she would find Bonaparte, though she crossed half Europe in the quest; and every hour, he said, carried them nearer to that scene of French excess and French brutality which he would gladly have kept from her knowledge. For a deserted country,

an outraged people must speak to her with no uncertain tongue. Already, as they rode, the ragged peasants fled from their cottages to hide in the sedge grass while the little cavalcade swept by. There was a ruined church with its toppling walls and its charred beams and its crazy beggars dying in its forgotten porch, to say plainly, "This is the beginning of things." Gaston feared her questions, but when he heard them, he answered her frankly.

"This is why your countrymen die in Venice, is it not?" she asked him at the ruined church. He admitted it with the best apology his honesty could make.

"You will never make war anything but barbarism," he said. "Yes, I know it is very dreadful, but your Slavonians have done worse. These people refuse to feed hungry men and then the trouble comes. Moreau was through here," he added in explanation, "and he is a fine gentleman. Moreau would never permit this sort of thing unless there had been great provocation. You must try to look at it from both sides, Beatrice."

"I am doing so. There are no walls and it is not difficult, Gaston. Did this fine gentleman, General Moreau, set up that dreadful object? Were those poor peasants so necessary to him that provocation must deal with them so? I will not believe it while I believe in God and Christ. There is no provocation which burns the children's home and leaves them sobbing at the roadside. We'll begin with that, Gaston, or our friendship must suffer in the end."

He was without defence this time, for their journey had carried them by a one-time village where, but three days ago, the French had entered to find a prosperous community, and had left it a few hours later with none for a witness but these waifs of the roadside who lifted white faces to the troopers and cringed as from an assured danger. The first of the houses, a substantial inn, still smoked and flamed—the church was in ruins; blackened rafters and crumbling walls marked the site of cottages; but a spectacle more terrible was that of a peasant nailed to the door of his own house by a bayonet thrust through his body and not withdrawn. The horrible distorted face, the open eyes of the dead man, were not forgotten by Beatrice for many days; and when she had given the children money, she rode quickly from the place.

"Let us go where the fine gentlemen are not," she said quietly; "I am not brave enough for this, Gaston."

He understood her and made no further attempt to explain it. The country through which they passed repeated the story of the French army and the "glorious chivalry" of the Corsican, its master. To such a man was Beatrice going to beg his clemency on behalf of her people and herself. She did not wonder that her courage failed her, and that as the night came on her hope sank and she realised her loneliness. Nevertheless, the night was welcome to her, for it hid such sights from her affrighted eyes. It was no longer her own Italy through which she

rode, but a devastated land peopled by roving bands of savage soldiers who devoured the very houses when the bread was eaten. That she should be in some way the ally of such marauders distressed her beyond any trouble she had known in Venice. She felt that she was helping her country's enemies, and yet her good sense told her when she permitted it to speak that she was not. Sometimes she would ask herself if it was anything at all but passion for this handsome soldier that had carried her out of Venice. She did not deny that it might be so ; and while the thought excited her, and she entertained it with the joy of one who loves, she invented new excuses to justify the flight and its possible consequences. And Gaston's eyes searched her own always ; even when the darkness fell she was conscious of his burning regard ; and she felt drawn toward him as in that moment of surrender at her own house when the desire to save his life had betrayed her to declare her love for him in one sudden burning caress. Yes, she loved him ; but their love must end barrenly in a memory of mutual help and affectionate comradeship. The intimacy of the journey, however, drew her closer to him in a silent understanding ; and as the night deepened, he took her hand in his own, and burning fingers closed about her palm and thrilled her at the touch.

"Moreau is at Bovoleta," he said, breaking the silence after a long interval ; "you shall hear him in his own defence. He is a fine fellow, Moreau. I'm sure he must have been much provoked, or all this would have been different. Of course, I don't

like it, Beatrice—at least now. It is all different since I knew you. When I was with the Army at Nice I never thought about it at all. These things happen in war, and if you make war, you must put up with them. We fellows take our orders, it is not our business to criticise them. I wished the success of my own regiment — you understand that. I believed in Napoleon's genius, and I believe in it still. It would be dishonest of me to say that anything which has happened in Venice has altered my own feelings about that. It has not. I shall try to serve France as zealously as ever I did, but if I can help your people I will do so. After all, we are not at war with you even now, and the situation may be saved. Those lights over there should be Bovoleta. The General himself may not be far off."

Beatrice liked his candour, and, in truth, she understood as well as he did the elementary principles which guided his conduct. Furthermore, she was very glad to think that the first stage of their journey was drawing to its end, and she watched the glimmer in the sky as a sailor watches the distant harbour's lights. It must be a very large camp, she thought, which could so canopy the sky with a shimmer of crimson radiance; and when they had gone a little way further her wonder at its brightness increased. The road hereabouts carried them from the plain through a vineyard toward the crest of a little hill; and when they had come out from the trees upon an open plateau of the grassland again, the mystery of the light made itself plain to them both, and they knew that they were

not looking upon the beacon fires of Moreau's division, but down upon the burning houses of Bovoleta.

This weird spectacle, silhouetted in fire against the curtain of the night, sent a hand to every bridle rein, and halted the company as though a trumpet blast had sounded in the stillness. Had a drama been played upon some mighty stage to engross by the very fascination of its tragedies, they could not have been more fascinated. It was all so clear, so plainly to be understood even by the eyes of a child. Down yonder, nestling at the hill's foot, lay the village of Bovoleta. It bordered a road upon either side and stretched itself out a little way both to the north and the south. This village was now in flames, and the leaping tongues of fire, driven by the west wind, surged and roared with devouring ferocity. So fierce was the glare that the road itself looked like a molten river winding between the burning houses ; and here and there upon it the figures of the soldiers, and the terrified people, spoke of defence and assault and the wild surprise of the night. Beatrice could distinguish horsemen riding up and down that winding way as though the most savage lust of slaughter was their only impulse. Upon the roof of the church, from whose windows jets of fire were spurting, some thirty women and children had gathered ; and these the troopers watched exultingly, deriding their screams and piteous outcry, and mocking them with promises of safe conduct if they would come down. But the staircase by

which they had ascended was aglow with flame, and the wretched creatures, driven to madness, clung to each other hysterically and awaited the end. Elsewhere it was a cowardly slaughter. Dragoons chased the wretched peasants from house to house, slashing at them with their swords and driving them into the furnaces ; others carried such of the girls as they could find, screaming, to the hills. Even the children were not spared.

Scarce a word was spoken by those upon the height during the enactment of this cruel drama. If the Frenchmen themselves were by no means displeased at it, they respected my lady's presence and held their own tongues. Gaston himself could not make any reasonable apology. He had known that these things were done ; had done them himself, in fact, when he led his regiment across the Alps ; and he began to perceive how utterly impossible it was to defend or explain them. In some vague way he tried to convince himself that Beatrice's common sense would make good his own deficiency. She could not hold him responsible for these acts of which he was but a spectator.

"It cannot be Moreau," he said when the waning flame died down and the glare passed from the cloudless sky. "These are some of the outposts. I think they must be L'Allemand's men. I suppose they made requests and were refused. Well, they will have to answer for it. We must find out *who* they are, Beatrice. It is not safe to go on until we know. You are tired and so am I ; let us send a messenger down and wait for him. We shall do

very well here with the things we brought from Chioggia. I am sorry you have seen this, but you will know how little I have to do with it."

"Yes, yes," she said quickly, "you are but a servant. I will try to forget it, Gaston. Let us rest, as you say—I am very tired—the night has been long."

He was glad that she did not reproach him, and, calling two of the troopers, he sent them down to the village to ascertain who was in command and where General Moreau might be found.

The spot whereby they had halted proved altogether very suitable for a resting-place, and the crumbling walls of an old castle upon the crest of the hill called them naturally to its shelter. They had brought food and wine from Chioggia; and while some of the men unpacked the baggage, and others tended the patient horses, Gaston led Beatrice into the ruined keep and spread his cloak for her upon the velvet grass. Here the walls shut out the view of the distant valley, and there were no evidences of the tragedy which had overtaken it. A full round moon mounting towards the zenith flooded the keep with mellow beams of clear white light, and cast splendid shadows far down the hill-side. None intruded upon them when the supper was served; they sat down to bread and meat and the common wine of the country like peasants returning to their mountain homes from a visit to the city.

It was a bewitching hour and both felt the spell of it. They were like those carried away from the

fret and strife of environing troubles to some distant retreat, where no whisper of doubt and difficulty could cloud their minds; where past and future might give way to the enjoyment of the present. To-night, perchance, Beatrice forgot that she had ever been a leader in that Venice of the old time; that her *salons* had received the most distinguished figures of Italy and of Europe; that she had ruled men and parties; and that all this had culminated in exile and infamy. The pastoral beauty of the scene, the soft moonlight, the silence, ensnared her to forget, so that she became merely the woman endowed with the more primitive instincts and abandoned to the impulses of love. Gaston was very near her then; she felt it in every gesture, though few words were spoken either on his part or on hers. The message between them was this: "There is no world for you or me but that which we create for ourselves and for each other."

They knew it, and yet the comedy must be played all the same. She could laugh at him struggling with the wine-flask; deride him when he unpacked the baskets; laugh at his maladroit fingers, and permit his cheek to touch her own when they bent above the white cloth spread out upon the grass.

They spoke of common things; of their first meeting in the chapel of the Cathedral; of the rose leaves they had scattered upon the pavement; of his visit to her house; of the captive she had made of him; but she would not speak of her own weakness when she wished to save him, and his hin-

at it plainly displeased her. So for a spell the meal went on in silence, though their hands touched again and again, and eyes said to eyes, "I love you." Deep satisfaction in their solitude, the romance of the hour and the glory of the night, filled them with a perfect joy which no words could express. Each knew how wholly happiness depended upon the other, and that nothing which came afterwards could make this bond of love less secure. So they finished their simple meal in silence, and when all was cleared away Gaston began to speak about sleep and the needs of to-morrow.

"You must rest," he said with great affection; "it will never do to go on like this. Verona is a long way off, and the road is difficult. I am wondering now why we should go to Verona at all. All the world is before us if you wish it as I wish it. Why should we return to trouble, Beatrice? Have we not ourselves?"

"I do not know why," was all she could answer. "I am very tired, Gaston. So much has happened—it is impossible to say what is for the best. No, you must not hold my hands like that; it is better not."

The look in her eyes denied the words, and he closed his arm about her and drew her head down upon his shoulder. The passionate words which escaped him expressed something of that great joy of his love, but not the whole of it, nor always coherently. The world indeed was theirs, as he said. The kind stars shone down upon them. They could make the future what they willed.

Of such was the dream, and perchance it might have been so, and Rome or Naples or the Southern Seas might have offered them a haven had the messenger delayed. But he returned within the hour, and his return summoned Gaston to the camp.

"General Moreau is there, Excellency, and he is waiting for you."

So spoke reality.

"Ha," said Gaston, leaping to his feet. "Then Moreau is there after all. He has come too late," he added, reflectively.

He asked the man if the General was alone and under what circumstances the order had been given.

"He is not alone, Excellency. General Bonaparte is with him."

"General Bonaparte?"

"Yes, Excellency. He has just ridden in from Verona."

Gaston turned to Beatrice full of excitement and plainly agitated.

"I can be there and back in an hour," he said. "Of course I shall explain everything. Perhaps it is better that I should go alone and tell them. You will be quite safe here, and I will send some one I can trust to keep the hill. Try to sleep, Beatrice; I am sure you want it."

The message had been delivered at the gate of the Keep, and Beatrice stood there while he spoke. She did not complain because he left her. The voice in the night was that of necessity rebuking

UPON THE ROAD TO PADUA 245

the dream. Her heart sank within her, but she said, "Go."

"It is wiser," she said, and then laughingly, "I shall expect you to breakfast."

The trooper had left them and they were alone again. He caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

"Oh, breakfast will be too late," he cried, "say before the clock strikes twice."

And so he mounted his horse, and, waving his hand often, he rode down toward the village.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE AMBASSADOR

GIOVANNI GALLA made his mistress a couch in the hut of the vineyard, and when she could no longer espy Gaston's figure upon the winding road below, she tried to sleep a little while, despite her rude surroundings. It was very still upon the hillside, and the quiet of the night allowed her to review very calmly and soberly the course upon which she had embarked, and its likely consequences. Were it as the messenger said, and General Bonaparte himself at the Camp in the valley, the purport of her journey would be quickly attained, and she would know before sunset to-morrow what answer she might carry to her countrymen. Although she did not admit it to herself, her interest in any serious ambition of this journey became less hour by hour. A strange excitement, a subtle joy of the intimate moments she had spent with Gaston, lingered like the perfume of a flower and entranced her still. She did not know how it was, but these last few days had robbed her largely of that mastery of will and dominion of idea which

used to be so greatly characteristic of her. Their place was taken by the pleasing idea of the sacrifice of self to love, the abandonment of all else to a man's will, the whole gift of her heart and mind to another's keeping. She could not reproach herself; she did not wish to. The spell of the silent hour compelled her to understand the precise value of those emotions which dictated human conduct. Here she was as resolute a child of Venice as any in the city; a patriot burning with the truths of freedom and liberty; resenting bitterly the outrages upon her people; scarcely daring to think of the horrid sights the roadside had disclosed to her; and yet supreme above all these things was the passion of that moment when Gaston had held her hands and her heart beat against his own. After all, she said, she was the woman first and patriot afterwards, and thus it always had been since the story of the world.

The night was very silent, and yet from hour to hour some voice spoke to her out of the darkness. Now it would be the sound of horses galloping upon the distant road; now church bells chiming the hour, or, again, the bugle's note, and the answering blast across the valley. As the night deepened her consciousness of these sounds became less and less, and all her thought concerned itself with Gaston's return. He would come to her with Bonaparte's message, perhaps; they would go together to the camp; she would plead for her people, and then be free to think of herself and her own interests. For the future she had no clear plan;

and while she was aware that she could not return to Venice, she understood that from Gaston the final word must come. It might be that he would wish to take her to Paris. She would have preferred to live in Italy, but her first marriage had made France known to her, and the idea of going to Paris did not displease her. Bonaparte would help her to save her fortune—she thought that she could contrive so much, and for the rest it did not matter where her life would be lived.

Beatrice had just pictured to herself a house in Paris and Gaston for the master of it when she fell into a heavy sleep from which the dawn hardly awoke her. Her eyes were heavy still when she sat up and tried to remember how she had come to such a forsaken place. The glamour of the scene had passed with the moonlight, and it was wild and bleak in the first grey light of day. The castle itself had been a picturesque ruin as she viewed it last night, but now it was merely a wall of crumbling stone jutting up from a desolate hill. The valley, the high road, the village, they were not visible through the thick white mists which lay heavily upon them, and there was a bleakness in the air which chilled her through. She did not mean to sleep like this, she said, and asked herself what kept Gaston. Why did he not return as he promised? This question was unanswered when she became aware that some one approached the place with stealthy tread; and going out to the Keep she perceived the stranger for the first time.

He was a short man, and he wore a rough grey

overcoat, with a cocked hat and Hessian boots and white breeches ; and he carried a spy-glass under his arm. His face looked very white in the morning light, but his eyes were piercingly black, and they regarded her so intently that she turned from their gaze as from a light which dazzled her. Quite a long time passed before the stranger either moved or spoke, and she was about to quit the place and to summon Giovanni to her side, when the man at last addressed her.

"So you are Madame de St. Remy?"

"Yes," she said, without looking at him, "I am Madame de St. Remy. But have I not the honour of knowing you, Monsieur?"

He laughed lightly at her question, and, crossing the grass to her side, he blocked the aperture by which she would have passed out.

"I am very glad to hear it," he said slowly, and with a nod of satisfaction. "We are old friends, Madame, although you forget me. . . . But you see I do not forget you. I recognised you at once."

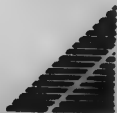
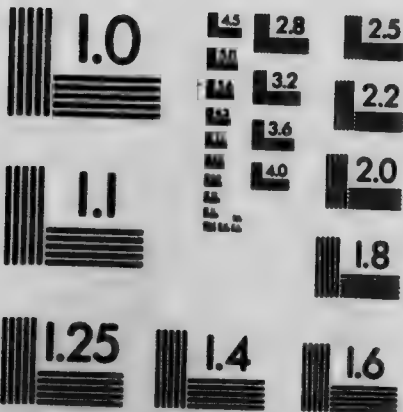
He laughed again as though her embarrassment pleased him. There was something so masterful in his manner, so impossible to contradict, that Beatrice found herself quite helpless, and was unable to reply to him with any satisfaction.

"I do not, indeed, remember you," she said, "and yet I seem to remember your face, Monsieur. Perhaps you are with General Moreau and the army of occupation. Yes, it must be that ; or, perhaps"—and here her face brightened at once—"you bring



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me news of Monsieur de Joyeuse. How foolish of me not to have thought of it."

The stranger still continued to regard her with his shining black eyes ; but the sound of a bugle in the valley below arrested his attention at once, and he put his spy-glass to his eye, and for some considerable time he searched the distant hills and such ridges of the valley as the rolling mists disclosed. Beatrice could not understand what kept her at the man's side or why she did not move away at once to find Giovanni Galla. She remained, however, patiently in the same place, and presently the stranger turned and laid his fingers almost familiarly upon her arm. She remarked it as characteristic that although his thoughts had been concentrated wholly upon the disposition of the troops about the hills, he could, nevertheless, take up their conversation exactly at the place in which he left it off.

"Yes," he said quietly, "women are often foolish and do not think, Madame. I hear that you are an exception," and then he added, "My friend, Monsieur de Joyeuse, tells me so."

Her face flushed. It would have needed a less clever man to read her story when he mentioned the Count.

"Then you do come from him, Monsieur ?"

"From no one else, Madame."

"But," she said, and the colour left her face again, "but why does he not come himself ?"

"He does not come himself, Madame, because he has gone to Verona."

"To Verona ?"

"At the General's command. Yes, to Verona ; and that is why he sends so poor an ambassador. I am to apologise for him, Madame, and to say that he will return as soon as may be. In the meantime—yes, in the meantime we must find a house for you."

The enigma of it all pleased him greatly, and with increasing familiarity he closed his fingers upon her arm and drew her still closer to him.

"Yes," he repeated, "you must put up with me, Madame. I am the Count's ambassador . . . his brother, his foster-father, all the relations that he has. You will acquiesce in my authority ; you will obey me. Let us begin at once. I command breakfast as soon as may be. We will have it together, and get dry clothes. Are you an Italian and do you risk the night air ? Good God ! what folly. I see plainly how fortunate it is that I take the Count's place. But you——," and here he touched her ear lightly with his fingers, "you do not think so. Women are all the same. There is only one man in the world. Well, it is lucky for the one man."

Beatrice did not know why she permitted this familiarity or listened to him so patiently. The memory of the face grew upon her from moment to moment although she could not identify it. At first she thought that he might be General Moreau himself. She named him even for a greater personage, but his inconspicuous dress and the fact that he seemed to have come without escort ridiculed this suggestion ; and she dismissed it as worthless.

"If you can take me to any house where I shall

find dry clothes, I will admit your relationship to Count Gaston," she said lightly. "Since your countrymen burn our homes, I do not see why you quarrel with us Italians for sleeping on the grass. Besides, it is I who suffer. Has not La Rochefoucauld reminded us that we bear the misfortunes of our neighbours very easily, Monsieur ! Pray do not let mine incommode you."

"They shall not, Madame," he said, with a wave of the hand, and then he called loudly, "Junot, here is our prisoner ; come and take care of her."

So he showed her that he had not come to the hillside alone. Hardly had his voice been raised when a General mounted upon a sturdy black horse came cantering over the grass, and was followed by quite a little company of *aides-de-camp* and staff officers. These drew rein to salute him, and General Junot himself rode up to Beatrice's side.

"Madame de St. Remy," he exclaimed, holding out his hand gallantly. "I knew your father well, and remember you in Nice, but you have forgotten me."

"No, indeed," she said ; "but you were the last person I expected to find at Bovoleta. Please introduce me to your friend."

General Junot laughed until the hillside rang.

"Impossible," he cried, "impossible, Madame."

She knew now and understood her mistake.

"You are General Bonaparte," she said quietly, turning to the stranger. "I should have known it by your eyes."

The answer pleased him.

"Remember that, Junot," he cried gaily. "I am known by my eyes. Well, they can look a long way ahead sometimes. Come, gentlemen," he said, addressing the staff. "I think our coffee is ready, if Madame will honour us."

He waved his hand, indicating a substantial farmhouse across the valley, and one of the troopers running for Beatrice's horse, General Junot himself helped her into the saddle and rode at her side towards the hill road.

But Bonaparte was deep in talk with an *aide-de-camp*, and appeared already to have forgotten her existence.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ADVOCATE

THE farmhouse lay in the heart of the valley, a long white building throwing out wings toward the hills and offering bright green *jalousies* to the morning sun. The brick courtyard before its doors had been entirely given up to the horses and equipage of the staff, and herein were to be seen the uniforms of many regiments, and that bustle and display which attend the headquarters of an army in the field. Each moment brought some *aide-de-camp* at the gallop to inquire for the general who waited his despatch. Rank and station were alike forgotten by the pushing, reeking throng which struggled about the stable doors and had no concern but for the individual welfare. Generals took their stable orders from mere colonels at such a time, and were glad to get them. Common troopers who could tell you where to lead your horse, had the dignity of marshals in their knowledge. Hunger levelled all and sent proud men begging for bread more precious than diamonds.

Confused as was the scene at his doors, the rooms

within the farm were reserved entirely for Bonaparte and his immediate *entourage*. A long table, set out beneath a trellis of vines at the rear of the house, had been covered by the maids with such treasures of the larder as marauding bands and their own ingenuity had left to them; and if these were far from substantial, consisting chiefly as they did of bread and fruit and vegetables, they were served upon spotlessly clean linen, and accompanied by the messages of laughing eyes which did not for the time being fear the French nor regard them as enemies. General Bonaparte, at least, had other keys for the cellar door than the butt end of a musket. And he was an excellent judge of a shapely hand, as the maids bore witness.

There was silence for a moment when Bonaparte rode in, and some remark at the presence of a handsome woman in his train. One or two of the company recognised Beatrice when General Moreau helped her from her horse; and they claimed her, not for what she was, a true Italian and the most faithful servant of Venice, but for a comrade from Paris whom misfortune has sent out to exile in this unhappy country. Circumstance, indeed, was making of her every hour a partisan of these people who brought such misfortunes upon Italy; and if, in her heart, she resented the *impasse*, none the less was she wise enough to see that she might profit more by acquiescence than by protest. And so she answered them as she could, and, following General Moreau to the house, he conducted her to the table at which Bonaparte was already seated. It was

here, to her great surprise and not a little to her relief, that she found herself the neighbour of the amiable Joseph Villetard, who had ridden headlong from Chioggia so soon as he heard that Bonaparte was with the army and that Beatrice would find him. "A clever woman like that may undo all," the Chevalier said. He was determined to be present at the interview.

"It could not possibly have been better," he said when he rose to greet her; "I was hoping for some good fortune, but not for this."

And then to Bonaparte he added—

"Madame la Marquise will be too modest to tell you all, General; I shall have much to say for her."

Bonaparte, who had begun to eat ravenously directly he sat down, drained a basin of coffee at a draught, and then he regarded Beatrice with a long and troubling stare, in which he appeared to be judging her for himself apart from all report.

"Madame is very well able to speak for herself, it appears," he remarked with some emphasis; "I do not think she will need your advocacy, Villetard. Eh, Madame, will you have the Chevalier for your lawyer?"

"Since he is my friend, I prefer to keep him in that capacity," rejoined Beatrice, laughing at each of them in turn. Bonaparte liked the thrust and went on with his questions.

"Why do your people kill Frenchmen?" he asked in his blunt way. "What excuse are they going to make to me for Laugier, Madame? They will be modest enough about that, I'll be bound—as modest

as their generals, who run away if one of my troopers shouts at them. But they shall pay me in full for that day's work. I can be a troublesome creditor, as the poltroons who govern Venice will presently find out. Do not tell me, Madame, that you have come here to speak of Laugier?"

He looked at her very sternly, and a dead silence fell upon the company. All eyes were now turned upon Beatrice, who coloured while the General spoke, but answered him with spirit and even a degree of defiance. Perhaps she did not understand how much depended upon her answer; but Willetard knew, and he watched her intently, as though weighing every word that fell from her lips.

"The folly has not been all upon one side in Venice, General," she began; "there are wise men and others in every Directory—even in that of Paris."

A murmur of laughter ran round the table, and all now looked at Bonaparte. Scarcely ten minutes had passed since he had been deploring the insensate economy and crass ignorance of the Government, which denied the commonest necessities to his army in Italy. When Beatrice turned upon him, he sat for an instant like one in deep thought, and then beat heavily upon the table with his fist.

"Ha," he cried, "here's a philosopher for you! You are quite right, Madame—there are fools and wise men everywhere; but that does not make it any less necessary to hang the fools."

"Oh, let them be hanged by all means, General, if it is good for the wise men to do so. But we do not judge a people by its rulers."

"Agreed, Madame ; we judge it by the rulers' acts. Am I to pardon those who shot Laugier because there are wise men in Venice ? That's an argument I cannot follow. Pray make it clear to me."

"I cannot do so, General ; it is not my own argument. Punish the guilty by all means, but do not punish yourself at the same time. The French have many friends in Venice who are ready to welcome them in true friendship ; but injustice will alienate them for all time. If I were seeking the help of Italy, I would not begin with the gallows and the guns. No ; I would first seek out my friends and protect them."

"Meaning, Madame, that others like yourself are in danger from these rascals."

"Meaning rather, General, that what Venice needs is liberty to speak for her own interests and the interests of her French allies as well. Consider, this act of justice will be deemed an act of war against my people. It will unite the factions and turn two against you where one is now a friend. You will punish the guilty, but the innocent will suffer also. That is a woman's wisdom, but a man may not find it unprofitable to follow it. I speak as one who was a Frenchman's wife, but am none the less a lover of Italy and her liberties."

"And as one of whom it was said, Madame, that her house was the grave of Frenchmen. I see you do not trouble yourself to contradict the story."

"There are some stories, General, which are better left uncontradicted. I appeal to Monsieur Ville-tard."

The Chevalier had listened to the duologue with mingled feelings of admiration and chagrin, and he was delighted at the opportunity he now enjoyed of diverting Napoleon's attention from an argument so dangerous to his own designs.

"I am entirely of Madame's opinion," he said. "If there is one house in Venice where my countrymen are safe from the assassins of that unpleasant city, it is at the Casa degli Spiriti. I have written to you as much, General, in my letter which spoke of the murder of poor Laugier. He died calling upon France to avenge him. Your name was the last upon his lips."

"It shall not be in vain, Chevalier. No Frenchman shall call upon me and find me deaf. I am here to tell these Venetian emissaries as much. They come this morning for my answer. They shall have it in plain words."

He rose from the table, and, seeming to dismiss the subject in an instant, he beckoned Moreau to him, and they left the room together. One by one, with a gracious word to Beatrice, the others followed him until she was left alone with the Chevalier, who, for the first time since she had known him, appeared unwilling to open the conversation.

"Marquise," he said at length, and as one feeling his way timidly, "so our friend Gaston is at Verona?"

She answered him with some show of indifference that she had the General's word for it.

"And you yourself," he persisted, "are naturally anxious to be upon the road?"

"I have no plans, Chevalier."

"Forgive me if I make them for you. Yes, I have already discussed it with the General. He wishes you to go to Verona and establish your *salon* there. It is not good for a city when the leaders of its society desert their houses. We do not wish it to be told to Europe that we are monsters preying upon the social life of Italy. You will go to Verona to a house provided for you, and will set an example to Frenchmen and Italians alike. The Count is waiting for you there, Marquise—you must not make him anxious."

It was a great surprise to her, and so frank in its declaration that she detected the purpose of the scheme even while he spoke. Bonaparte would establish her in Verona that he might say to Europe, "The best Italians welcome me and invite Frenchmen to their houses." All her instinct was to refuse to be the instrument of this policy; but while she hesitated, Villetard availed himself of his opportunity and suggested a new argument to her.

"It is a dangerous mission and few could be relied upon. A clever woman may do much for Italy if she have the courage, Marquise. She will find a brave colleague in my friend Gaston, who is now appointed to the command of the defences. I know that he is counting upon you in this. I am sure you will not fail him."

He knew that he had said enough and he cared nothing for her procrastination.

"Give me time," she protested, ultimately, "and I will answer you, Chevalier."

"Until sunset, Marquise. In the meantime, let us go and see Moreau's dragoons. The General reviews them this morning, and they are to ride to Verona with you. Yes, you would not wish to keep Gaston waiting."

Beatrice followed him from the house, wondering at the strange fate which set her footsteps ever in the path of the man she loved.

As far as Joseph Villetard was concerned, she was already at Verona.

CHAPTER XX

THE OTHER WOMAN

GIOVANNI GALLA was at the door of the farmhouse when Beatrice came out, and while he helped her to mount her horse he told her a piece of news which astonished her not a little.

"The Lord of Brescia is here," he said ; "he is with Bonaparte."

She reflected upon it a moment, and then rejoined in a low voice—

"I should like to speak with him, Giovanni. See if you cannot bring him to me."

"It is easily done, Excellency—I will not fail."

He said no more, for the Chevalier now joined them, riding a good bay horse and full of the gay scene which the warm, bright day disclosed. The air was very fresh and balmy upon the hillside, and to the valley below, usually so still and remote and pastoral, the masses of moving troops, the banners,

the horsemen and the guns, lent a rich fresco of moving colour which changed its facets every instant, and reflected delicious harmonies pleasing to the eye and never garish. Bonaparte himself, wearing the little grey cloak and the cocked hat, had chosen an outstanding plateau, flanked by a plantation of pines, for his saluting base, and here, with a hundred officers in brilliant uniform about him, he waited for Moreau's dragoons, who were massed in a great meadow below him.

"Those are the fellows who are about to carry our messages to Austria," said Villetard a little proudly as he led the way toward the group; "you may be quite sure that they will be safely delivered. Are they not splendid, Marquise? Don't you see that we keep up appearances, in spite of our Directory?"

"It is very evident, Chevalier—even the houses speak for you."

She indicated the burned and blackened villages below, bare to the day as some spectre of death from which the hand of dawn had drawn back the veil. These charnel houses, which yesterday had been the homes of a happy people, were for the French troopers so many ruined jests which they passed by with brutal laughter as scenes of revelry now closed to them but none the less reminiscent of pleasure. Nor was Villetard unable to apologise for them. He welcomed such a witness to the victorious progress of a master whom he served without question.

"Of course," he admitted, "if the houses did not

“speak for us, Marquise, there would be no peace. Confess that you would have admitted their eloquence if they had been French houses? It is always the vanquished who deplore the cruelty of war. We Frenchmen are not naturally cruel. But we have to win battles, and this is the only way to win them.”

He turned the subject adroitly by calling her attention to the advancing cavalry, wheeling about upon the open plateau in preparation for the great ride before Napoleon and his staff. The scene was memorable, and scarce likely to be forgotten by either of them. The green hills, rising range by range toward the purple mountains, and in the far distance to the caps and domes of the eternal snows, were decked out with all the garish, scintillating colours of an army at the bivouac. Watch-fires still burned, the grassy slopes were white with the unfolded tents; infantry moved at the double; guns were dragged hither, thither, and all as the little grey man dictated, sometimes merely by the gesture of the hand, often by a single word to a restive *aide-de-camp*. And at the heart of it all was the blackened village and the charred houses and the little tumbling river, which sung no less sweetly because the dead were hidden by its waters.

A bugle note rang out clearly above other sounds, and then its notes were lost as the thunder of the galloping cavalry arose. Advancing as some human tornado with a voice of winds and a black cloud above them—irresistible, terrible, declaring a

force beyond human realisation, Moreau's division advanced toward the base. And as they rode, the cheers passed from hill to hill; and the men who beheld them worshipped at the shrine of their might and cast themselves in imagination at the feet of the grey-cloaked genius who had moulded and shaped this god-like instrument of terror. Beatrice, when she could turn her eyes from the glittering pennants, from the cuirasses shining as with the sheen of gold, from the fierce faces of the men, and all that magic of speed and majesty of terror, watched Bonaparte, and realised, perhaps, something of that unspoken emotion which swayed him at such an hour. The stern, set face, the motionless figure—neither the one nor the other declared the man, who was found rather in the fathomless black eyes shining as stars of a nation's victory. For Bonaparte looked through these men and beyond them, and he saw the kings of Europe at his feet, and the gate of the cities opened and one man the master of the known world. And he said, "Thus is my work begun."

The cavalry disappeared in a mist of dust, and to the lilting music of the trumpets and the drums. When it had passed by and the spell was lifted, Beatrice found herself surrounded by a little group of officers, of whom the most distinguished was General Moreau himself, the recipient of generous congratulations upon his division and the magnificent appearance it had made. When he had listened to all these, and Bonaparte had praised him before the staff, he turned to Beatrice, and appeared to find

relief in a woman's society and in the franker conversation there possible. She, on her part, welcomed him as the most courteous and manly of all the officers who had followed Napoleon to Italy, and she consented very readily to ride down a little way toward the village with him.

"The General has gone down to the church to meet the emissaries from Venice," he began; "they tell me there are friends of yours among them?"

"Indeed," said Beatrice; "and what may their names be, General?"

"The Secretary, Francisco Pesaro, and your old friend, that delightful charlatan, the Lord of Brescia."

She laughed with him at the account of Lorenzo.

"He has come to explain away the death of your poor countryman, Laugier," she said.

"Then he will need all the breath in his body, Marquise. It was a rascally business, upon my word. I am not surprised that you have decided to go on to Verona."

He spoke with a kindly benignity, as though he read her thoughts exactly and knew what impulses guided her.

"But I have not decided to go—why do you speak of it, General?" she protested.

"Anticipation, Marquise, which follows closely upon conclusion. The General is determined that you shall be the Vice-Governor of Verona. I cannot imagine any woman refusing that position, especially

one so well fitted to occupy it as Madame la Marquise de St. Remy."

Beatrice was silent. She began to perceive that this design of sending her to Verona had become known to all the staff, and she understood that its political import could not be disguised. They would make her the tool of their own purposes, and proclaim to all the world that of her own will she thus consented to serve France. Every instinct of her patriotism rebelled against consent. She began to say that whatever haven destiny might open to her, the meanest or the most precarious, it would be better than the *salons* of Verona.

"I am flattered by the General's choice," she said anon, "but I cannot share his confidence. There will never be a true alliance between my countrymen and yours, General Moreau. If I go to Verona, your people will distrust me and my own will denounce me. You must credit me with little wisdom if you think I will take up such a burden lightly. Let me pay you the compliment of being sincere. You know quite well that I shall not go."

He did not contradict her, but laughed as though pleased at his own assurance.

"We shall see," he said; "difficulty, surely, is that which should make the surest appeal to Beatrice of Venice. You say that my own people will distrust you. I do not believe it. They will welcome any clever woman who strives to reunite those who were friends and should be friends again."

Think how much your presence may mean at such a time of stress as this. Verona is the General's chief concern. He will deal harshly with Venice while he believes that her Signory are deliberately promoting strife upon the mainland. When there is peace in Verona there will be compromise at the Ducal Palace. You, Marquise, with your great gifts and your acknowledged right, can do more to hasten the day of mutual understanding than all the battalions on the heights yonder. That is why I say that you will go—your duty to Venice compels you."

She shook her head, pleased as a woman ever is at the compliment, but firm still in her belief that they would make a catspaw of her.

"If General Bonaparte believed this, why did he not permit Count Gaston to say goodbye to me?" she asked naïvely.

Moreau had anticipated the question.

"Because, Marquise, there was not an hour to be lost. Verona stands on the brink of a cataclysm. A foolish word, an unwise deed, may cost many lives. Your friend Gaston is just the man to deal justly and promptly with such a situation as that. We sent him because we believed he was able to keep the peace in Verona until we can spare a division to help him. Every man we have is needed here just now. Our countrymen must take their chances until this campaign is decided beyond any doubt. We send them Gaston—he is as good as an army corps, and not so rash, perhaps."

"But you risk his life, General?"

"My dear Marquise, what servant of France does not?"

"Yes, but this is not a soldier's work. He may be assassinated in the streets."

"They said the same of him in Venice. He owed his safety to your generosity. You could increase the debt in Verona, perhaps."

"I don't think so. What authority have I? Besides, my friendship would not help him. You must see that I am better away."

"But you will not return to Venice—at least until we hold it in force."

"I shall certainly not return then."

"I admire your patriotism. If you were not half a Frenchwoman, there would not be so much to be said. After all, we do desire to treat Venice fairly. But she is obstinate, Marquise."

"And you tell her so in a loud voice, General."

They both laughed, in spite of the gravity of that which provoked their laughter. For their ride had carried them down to the church wherein Bonaparte received the deputation from Venice; and as they drew near, they could hear his voice raised in angry denunciation. He spoke of the death of Laugier, and in such tones that Beatrice shivered while she heard him. "Knaves, poltroons, murderers——" such phrases scattered at hazard conveyed but a tithe of the scathing accusation. They heard him conclude with the threat that the lion of St. Mark should float no longer upon

Terra Firma, and that the generals of division must everywhere treat the soldiers of Venice as enemies.

"When you bring me, alive or dead, the bodies of those who assassinated my Lieutenant Laugier, then will I listen to you, gentlemen."

Such was the final judgment against which Francisco Pesaro raised his voice in vain; while the pompous tones of Lorenzo, Lord of Brescia, exasperated Bonaparte to the last point.

"I shall yet hang you, old man!" he cried; "begone while there is still time."

The crowd of officers and troopers about the gate of the church gave way when the Venetians passed out, and General Moreau sought vainly to lead Beatrice from the place; for he understood that the scene could not fail to humiliate her. She stood her ground, however, and when the aged Pesaro advanced and she beheld tears of disappointment in his eyes, something of her country's wretched fortunes affected her also, and she could have wept with this brave ambassador who had failed so signally to turn Bonaparte's anger. Grief that she must witness this outrage upon a noble old man accompanied a sudden determination to quit the camp with him and return to Venice, cost her what it might; but immediately she had taken this resolution, Lorenzo, white with baffled rage and ruffled in plumage like a wounded bird, edged to her side and maladroitley effaced the impression which Pesaro had made upon her.

"You see how your friends treat me," he whis-

pered; "it needed but this, Marquise: that you should stand to hear it. I am driven out like a dog. Like a dog I return to my kennel."

"Thankful, my Lord, that the kennel remains," said Beatrice, in sudden anger that he should name her among those who thus had flouted the Doge's ambassadors. My lord, however, was too closely wrapped up in his own misfortunes to understand her resentment. She had helped to surmount so many barriers that he began to believe she would help him to surmount even this one.

"What answer shall I take the Signory—how can I return?" he asked her dolefully. "If I tell the truth, who will believe me? An ambassador who has been rated like a scullion. There's a tale for the Palace!"

"Then do not tell it, my Lord," suggested Beatrice, moved in her heart to some pity for him. "I am sure Francisco Pesaro will be wise to say nothing which attributes the blame to him. Let the Senate understand that Bonaparte is not a man to be won by threats. He cares nothing for your ancient dignity—why should he, since he is of yesterday and that which you boast of to him cannot but offend him? But you could win him by flattery," she added a little fearfully, with a swift glance about to be sure that none heard her.

The suggestion pleased Lorenzo very much. He recovered something of his lost dignity, and drawing his cloak about him he struck an attitude—an errant Cæsar debating in an uncongenial Forum.

"Nations do not flatter," he began—but Beatrice would not hear him.

"Claim Bonaparte as the saviour of Italy and throw yourself upon his clemency. It is your wisest course, Lorenzo. There is no one so well able to do it as the Lord of Brescia. He will listen to his own praises—what man does not? I have seen him, and I form my own judgments. You must be generous with your words."

"They shall be as many as pebbles on the seashore if they will serve my country. Ah, Beatrice, if you were there to dictate my answer to me! Why did you leave us—why did you forget our gratitude? I cannot understand."

"None but the devil or a little child understands a woman, Lorenzo."

"I really think it is so. And they tell me you go to Verona to set up your court there."

"They tell you that which is not true, my Lord; I am going to Rome, to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. I wish to forget all this, to be alone. A convent is my only refuge."

Lorenzo was far from sure of it.

"In the convents of Rome, men are forbidden to enter," he said, looking at her shrewdly.

"That is exactly why I am going there, Lorenzo. This is the last time you and I will ever meet. My resolution is inflexible."

"As a woman's—well, I do not quarrel with you. Verona is no place for a patriot. There are strange stories abroad, but I must know nothing of them," he added cautiously, although he knew perfectly well that he meant to see her.

"I have heard the same thing said before to-day," said Beatrice, for she did not wish to betray her curiosity. "They say our countrymen meditate something foolish. I hope that it is not true."

She remarked it with apparent indifference, as though it were the individual wish of one whose views were unimportant; and Lorenzo, taken off his guard and anxious to assert his own opinion, looked about him to be sure that he was not overheard, and then rising on his toes, he said—

"It is wholly true. If the thing goes well, there will not be a Frenchman alive in Verona when Lent is done. That is what we count upon. A general rising of the people against their oppressors, first at Verona, and then in every city of Terra Firma. We shall then have time to organise our armies. I have told the Senate so. It is my plan."

"Then, my Lord," said Beatrice, with some heat, "you are really more foolish than even I thought you to be."

He stared at her in angry amazement, for this was the first time in her life that she told him frankly what she thought of him. He, the Lord of Brescia, classed with common men, and by a woman! The gravity of his years waxed full, and he raised a hand to rebuke her, when the Chevalier Villetard, pushing his way through the throng at the church door, came across the street to them and greeted Lorenzo with some civility.

"They have prepared refreshment for you at the bivouac, my Lord," said he; "is it wise to delay?"

"I am going now," said Lorenzo, and with a last look of reproach and wounded vanity he turned to follow his colleague Pesaro up the valley. When he was gone, Villetard began to speak again of the arrangements that had been made for Beatrice's departure for Verona.

"The dragoons leave at dawn to-morrow," said he. "I am having two horses prepared for you. Your servant Giovanni will follow with the baggage."

"Then you do not accept my refusal to go, Chevalier?"

"I never had the least idea of accepting it, Marquise."

"But I am quite resolute in it."

"Forgive me, it is characteristic of your sex. There was another in Venice a few days ago who had determined not to go to Verona. She arrived there last night, I believe."

"Am I to be influenced by another woman in such a matter as this?"

"Oh, I leave that to your judgment. Bianca Pesaro was an old friend of Gaston's, was she not?"

Beatrice turned away her head, for she was quite aware that every scrap of colour had fled from her face.

"Are you quite sure of what you say, Chevalier?"

"My dear Marquise, you can prove that in one hour at Verona."

"Yes, yes," she said quickly, "but my determination not to go is unalterable."

The Chevalier could not resist a smile of triumph.

"The dragoons ride at dawn. I shall tell them to prepare a room for you at the farmhouse to-night," he said—and so he left her.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GLOVE IS THROWN DOWN

WHILE the amiable Villetard was quite convinced that Beatrice would go to Verona, Count Gaston had already arrived in the city of the Scaligers. He discovered there a people upon the verge of tumult, a victorious French army swollen by exaction and tyranny, and a Governor, Balland, who waited merely for some good excuse to break down the last barriers of pretence and boldly claim the government in his master Bonaparte's name. Verona, indeed, was upon the confines of her humiliation, and there was no street within her proud walls so humble that witnesses to her degradation were wanting there.

Gaston had ridden in at noon with a company of dragoons for his escort and the haziest notions of what he was to do now that his journey was accomplished. Bonaparte had said to him: "You stand for me; I will uphold your authority. Keep the peace between French and Italian. It is necessary to us at present." And with that Gaston set off confidently. But he had not ridden a hundred

paces from the gate of St. George when the truth became apparent to him, and he knew that he had come too late to serve France or Verona.

It was noon of the day, and the full sun caught a shine of silver from the sleeping river and was hot as fire upon the leaden roofs of the splendid churches. Not yet the hour of siesta, Gaston could not at first understand why none but French soldiers appeared in the silent streets and none but French sat at the doors of the *cafés*. He heard his own tongue everywhere—in the shops, by the churches, and even from the balconies above him in the narrow streets. The French flag flew from many a window; the solemn houses showed him more than one strange scene which seemed to speak of Italian eyes and French voices that wooed them in vain. But once in his ride toward the Castle of St. Felix did he receive a greeting from a true inhabitant, and then it was in a narrow street by the Duomo, where, upon a covered balcony far above him, he caught a glimpse of a veiled woman, who stretched out a fair white arm and permitted a deep red rose to flutter down like a wounded bird upon the saddlebags before him. Momentary as the vision was, Gaston recognised the girl, and blushed as she might have done when he recollected under what circumstances they had last met.

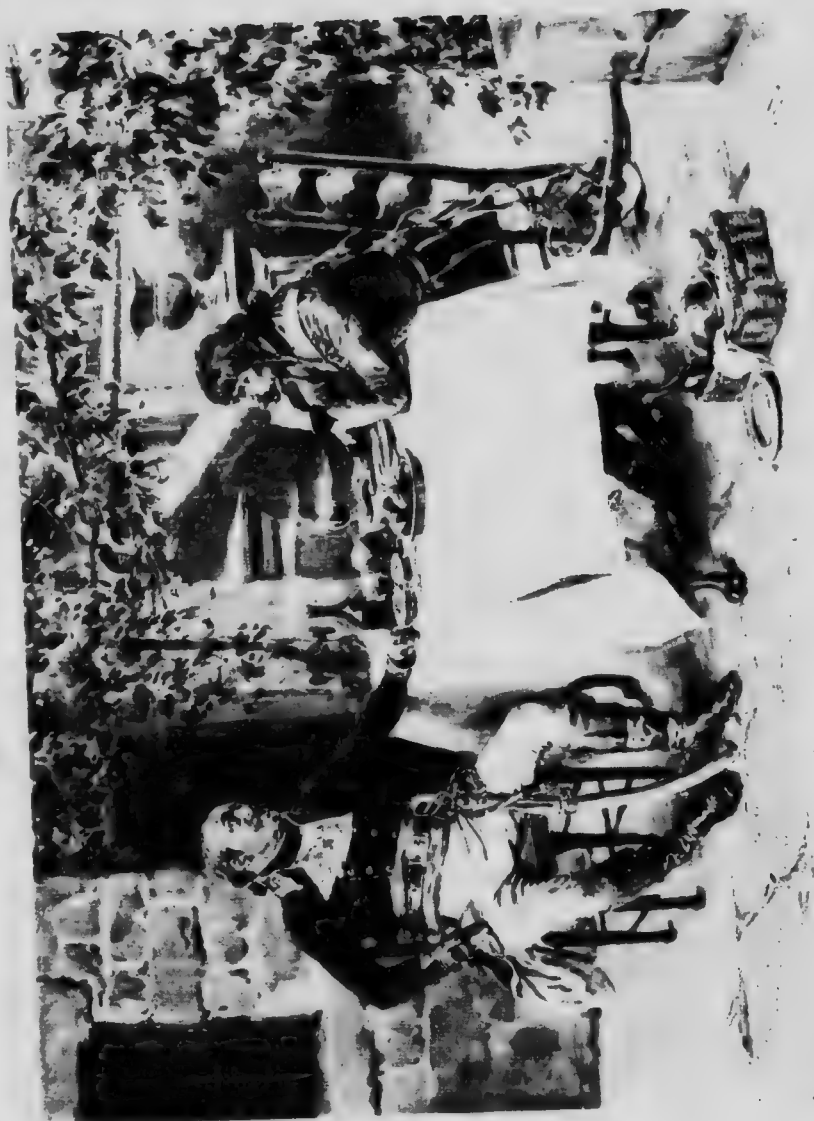
"It is Bianca, old Pesaro's daughter," he muttered; "then what the devil is she doing in Verona?"

He did not pick up her rose, and permitted the horses of his dragoons to trample it on the flags.

Perhaps he was angered with himself because his own acts had made it possible for the dark-eyed Bianca to throw a rose to him at all. Gaston's view of women had changed greatly since he stood in the old house in Venice and knew that he no longer wished to be alone. This trifling encounter seemed to bind him anew to Beatrice as with bonds of steel, and dismissing the matter from his thoughts, he rode straight on to the castle; and passing in between rows of gaping cannon and a garrison standing to its arms even in broad daylight, he met the Governor Balland and immediately delivered his papers.

"I shall read these by and by," said Balland affably—a squat, ungainly, brown-haired man, with eyes which looked across his nose and teeth which had no modesty. "You must get some of the dust off you, and then we will breakfast in the garden of the battlements. Yes, I see that you are astonished that we stand to arms, but you will understand it better by and by. Of course I welcome you, Count, especially as you come to me with such a recommendation."

Gaston did not reply that Balland's Governorship would be a matter of hours if the recommendation had not been found good; but when he had washed himself and changed his linen, he went down to the garden of which the Governor had spoken, and then they breakfasted together. It was an ideal spot, a veritable bower, its walls clothed with lichens and its roof warped with vines. Behind them were the turrets of the old castle, the jagged ancient wall



Governor Balland explains the situation

looming up like a monarch of a bygone age to protect its children in the tortuous winding streets below ; and beneath them lay Verona sparkling in the sunshine as though her red roofs had been dipped in a sea of crystals. The Duomo, the tremendous amphitheatre, tower and wall and campanile, the sleepy Adige spreading its lazy waters to feel for crumbling banks, gardens white with the flowers of spring, hills crowned with olives and the first fresh green of the vines—the vernal hand everywhere beginning to be visible, and the air blowing freshly as a breath from a land of roses. Here, indeed, might a traveller have found his Eldorado and have said that he would rest.

Gaston, who had scarcely drawn rein since he quitted Beatrice's side, ate heartily of the excellent breakfast, and when he had washed it down with a long draught of good white wine, he turned to the Governor Balland and began to speak openly of affairs in the city. The Governor, a raw, brutal man, was no less anxious to defend himself, and he declaimed his excuses with a fine flourish of oaths and a heavy fist banged often upon the table.

"The garrison stands at arms because it is war," said bluntly : "they threaten me, Balland, and I answer them so. Garavetta and Emili, the pick of the mob, are yonder on the hills with nine thousand troops. We have not three thousand in the city. Mother of God ! am I to sit on my haunches and laugh ? The General would be the first to say 'No.' I load the cannon and bark when they bark. You would do the same in my place, Count."

Gaston answered without impatience.

"Possibly, if I were quite sure that I could bite when necessity arose. You say that Emili is in the hills with nine thousand men. If that is so, he may have come to see your cannon, Balland. A man does not believe that you mean peace when you hold a pistol to his head. That is my view, and I have seen something of Italians and their cities. Draw in your horns, but be ready to put them out again. I shall begin by asking this same Emili and Garavetta to meet me in conference. Let us have it out face to face and know how we stand. Of course, if they want war they shall have it, as much as they can take. But at present we are at peace with them, and that peace must be real."

Balland laughed at the notion that any one could be at peace with him; and draining a cup of wine, he looked at an ungainly silver watch he carried upon a copper chain.

"Count," he said, "I will show you how I make peace with these devils. It is just one o'clock when they wish us to believe that they are asleep. Now, I shall wake them up and you will see what will happen. You can meet as many of them as you like in conference afterwards—but for God's sake go with a squadron of dragoons behind you. Now wait; and here's the blessed olive branch."

He beckoned one of the sentries to him, and the man went off briskly to carry his commands to the gunners. When a few minutes had passed, Gaston, being totally unaware of that which was to happen, a gun boomed out above the city and a great round

shot went hurtling over the red roofs until it fell with a crash at last upon the chimneys of an old white house not fifty yards from the church of St. Anastasia. Immediately a smoke of dust arose, and when it had drifted away the shattered wall and tumbled chimneys declared the true aim of the gunners and the success of this unprovoked outrage upon a peaceful city. One-half the house had fallen into the street, and the outer wall being utterly demolished, the bared rafters were visible and the broken furniture of the upper rooms. Moreover, those in the street below the house could hear the screams of its inmates and follow the steps of a woman who, holding a child by the hand, stood at the head of the staircase and begged them piteously to help her down.

Count Gaston sprang to his feet in angry astonishment when the report of the cannon stunned his ears. Nor could he immediately resist the morbid fascination of the scenes which enchained his unwilling eyes. No sooner had the echoes of the gun died away in the hills than the sleeping houses vomited men into the blazing sunshine; and some running in terror-stricken attitudes, some carrying muskets, others swords and daggers, they swarmed toward the amphitheatre at the heart of Verona as to a prepared rendezvous. At the same time the church bells rang out their dread tocsin; and what with their incessant jangling, and the hoarse voices of men, and the doleful cries of the women, a very pandemonium arose. Those more human scenes affected the Count less than the suggestion of armed

mystery which the houses offered to him. He faced the flaccid Balland, and asked him to explain.

"In God's name, what does it mean, sir? Be plain with me. It is I who am responsible now, not you, sir, as you will quickly discover."

His manner was grave and quiet, but the commonly absent eyes were lighted by a fire of purpose which even the obese Balland could not mistake.

"Once every day," the latter said, in a halting apology to which he could not lend confidence, "I show them that I am here. This is my message to the cut-throats who frequent Verona, Count. If I withhold my hand, then God help us. There is never a night which passes when some dirty hound or other has not his knife into a Frenchman. I am letting them know what is in store for them; and, by the heaven above me, I will burn down every house in the city if the lesson does not teach them manners. If it's your duty to do different, do it as you please. But while I'm responsible, I shall go on as I have begun; and you may tell Bonaparte as much if you don't agree with me. As for these carrion——"

"Our allies in Verona—yes, sir——"

"Call them what you please; it doesn't make them any different or take the muskets out of their hands. I say that they are no better than dogs, and are to be treated as such, and if you don't like it——"

"I like it so little that I'm going to end it this instant, Monsieur Balland. You can help me to do so, if you please."

"Show me the way and I'll help you readily enough."

"The way lies to the Duomo. You will apologise to Verona for this outrage, Monsieur Balland."

"If I do they'll cut the words out of my mouth."

"Then I am to report to General Bonaparte that you do not accept his orders?"

"You are to say that I am just a blunt soldier, and that I will see these people d——d before I will make any apology at all."

There was no mistake at all about it. Governor Balland had his hands upon his hips, and he struck the attitude of one who should say, "That's my meaning—take it or leave it." Nor did Gaston in his heart think less well of the man for his obstinacy. He liked courage whenever he found it, and he believed that this man was in some measure justified.

"Well," he said, "I do not wish to humiliate any man, Balland, but I am sure you are going the wrong way to work. If you don't apologise to these people, I shall. Fairness by all means, and justice upon that. We shall do nothing without that. I am going down now to tell the people as much."

"You will never return if you do," said Balland.

"I am counting upon your co-operation, Balland. Lend me a squadron of your hussars and I will ask nothing else. This folly cannot go on. The General would never tolerate it."

"Oh, as to that, the General tolerates most things which are successful."

"Perhaps. Let me see success and I will begin to listen. Am I to have the escort?"

"I will order it now. Pity you should go through. The old Governor is necessary after all, it appears."

"When he has heard a little wisdom, he will do excellently well, Balland."

In this spirit, the one saying, "You will never come back," the other hard set upon a purpose, they went down from the ramparts to the Castle gate, and there found the squadron of hussars for which Gaston had asked. Indifferent to any personal danger, the Count rode boldly at the head of his men straight toward the great amphitheatre at the heart of Verona; and no sooner had he come to the place where the most part of the insurgents were gathered than he began to speak to them in his clear young voice, offering his regrets for that which had occurred, and promising them in the name of Bonaparte a new era of justice and fair-dealing in the city. They heard him in some astonishment, and his courage prevented a hand being lifted against him. He knew, however, that one false word, one hasty threat, would be the signal for his death and that of the man who had followed him so unwillingly. Gaston, despite his odd defects of character, his vacillating moods and troublesome instability, had a nerve of iron. He faced the throng as one who was at the same time its judge and its friend. The people liked the attitude and heard him with attention. He remembered through the years that day when he had faced

five thousand in Verona and ten thousand eyes had looked up to his own with the gaze of those who spared him because of their curiosity.

A supple figure upon a good black horse—troopers massed behind him; the city of balconies awake and bristling—a vast mob of armed men catching up the words and tossing them from mouth to mouth, such was the picture as Gaston remembered it. Any man in that throng might have shot him in security, and yet no trigger was drawn. If he would have deluded himself into the belief that these people were craven and afraid, that which happened while he addressed them quickly undeceived him. For there stood in the forefront of his audience a fair-faced man who seemed to weigh every word that was spoken; and applauding especially those promises of justice and an armistice which astounded the citizens, he lifted his voice presently and cried, "*Vive la France.*" Aware of what he had done, of the madness and the fatality of it, the man instantly turned to back out of the serried ranks, but it was too late; and, his eyes shifting now to the right now to the left in terror, he raised his arms at last, uttered a loud cry and so fell headlong among them with a dagger in his heart.

Stillness, the herald of tragedy, fell upon the multitude when the act of vengeance was accomplished. All eyes searched Gaston's face; ears were strained to catch any word that fell from his lips. Would he bring the same fate upon himself; would this deed of blood awaken the passion and

anger of his race? Men waited with drawn breath to hear his answer. The cool, impassive face perplexed them. This man had a heart of stone, they said. For his words flowed on in an unbroken sequence. He reiterated his hopes for them and for France. Together, he said, they must save Verona. And they could answer "Yes" to that. Love of home, of country, of liberty responded to this promise of justice. They threw their caps in the air and cried, "Verona, Verona!" They forgot that they had arms in their hands.

But the final word was yet to be spoken. Count Gaston raised his hand to bid them hear him more surely.

"Citizens," he said, "if justice rewards, she must also punish. If fraternity is to be between us, then must a brother's blood be avenged. I speak as man to man, demanding of you to give as freely as it will be given. The crime which has been committed before our eyes to-day cannot go unpunished. Those who have foully slain an innocent man must answer to the judges. In the name of Verona, I arrest them here and now. See you to it that there be right and justice between us."

He wheeled his horse with dramatic suddenness, and pointing an accusing finger at the ruffians who had struck the Chauvinist down, he bade the sergeant drag them out. It was all so swiftly done and so unlooked-for that the hussars had two of the throng by the neck before a hand could be lifted against them; and the order instantly being given to advance, the squadron formed by fours and went

at a canter from the Plaza. The cries of baffled rage which followed it were the witness to the success of this daring *coup*. As at an unspoken command, lacking a leader but united, the vast concourse gave instant pursuit to the soldiers; and pouring pell-mell into the narrow streets which lie between the Arena and the Duomo, they shouted to each other to rescue the prisoners at all costs. Some, indeed, mad in the frenzy of action, fired their muskets at the retreating hussars, and the wild bullets whistled among their own friends, and left dead in the gutters whereby they ran. But the soldiers suffered some loss, and more than one man reeled in his saddle and fell from it before the Piazza delle Erbe was gained. Thence towards the Duomo, where Gaston would have addressed the people again, it was a veritable *mêlée*. Again and again the rear ranks turned and charged the frenzied mob. Shrieks and groans and oaths arose above the hubbub. The alarm bells summoned new combatants; houses were barred and shuttered—every hand was uplifted against the cursed invader, and it became plain even to Gaston that Balland was right, and that his chances of reaching the Castle of St. Felix were small indeed.

"What shall we do, old Jaincy?" he asked of the sergeant at his side.

Jaincy shook his shaggy head and confessed himself at a loss.

"Fire burn their cursed city to the stones," said he. "Here's a pretty mess, I must say."

"Yes, yes, my man; but words won't help it.

Shall we charge them or ride on? You've a wise head, Jaincy; speak up, man!"

"Oh, charge is my word. Let's rid the world of some of the vermin, live or die, Captain."

Gaston heard him with pleasure. The bugler unstrung his trumpet and gave the call, "Prepare to charge." They were in a typical street of the balconies, with towering roofs far above them and a sea-blue strip of sky for a heaven remote. Dark eyes looked down upon them from many windows; the white flowers of the spring time stood out in contrast with the fresh green *jalousies*—the heart of Verona was up there; the passion upon the flags of the foul gutters below.

The squadron wheeled as one man when it heard the call, and swords leaping from the scabbards like a flash of light in the path of sunbeams, the troop waited with nerves high strung and swelling veins and brains afire for the last command which should send it leaping upon the serried ranks of a maddened enemy. As the bugle rang out, a mighty torrent of sounds drowned all human cries and seemed like the roar of some mountain avalanche. Women reeled back fainting from the windows—the children believed this to be nothing else than the Day of the Judgment; but in the street itself the lust of slaughter defied fear and made men as animals. Leaping, striking, snarling, the mob fought with the terrible sword-thrusts at their hearts. Where there had been a burn of dirty brown water in the trough of the gutter, there was now a curdling crimson pool; the blue uniforms of the hussars

THE GLOVE IS THROWN DOWN 287

were rent until they were but as rags; savages leaped upon the horses' necks and dragged the riders down to a bed of stilettos. Gasps and groans, broken prayers testified the intensity of emotion and the agony of death. And still there was no victory. Gaston knew the folly of the deed even while it was being done. He should have waited for the open. The dead blocked this alley and made of it a *cul-de-sac*.

His own case was a parlous one, despite the fact that Jaincy and a dozen stalwart troopers shielded him with their bodies and their horses. From the first the mob had pointed the finger at him and said, "That is the man." The bullets rained about him like hail; he knew that he was wounded, though he scarcely suffered pain; and when a trooper fell back dead across his knees, and he could not rid himself of that terrible burden, there was nothing left but to sit and wait for the end, which must be sure and swift. Indifferent now, selling his life with a sigh, he was carried with the little company toward the door of an archway for which old Jaincy had been striving from the first. There would be shelter there; a wall for a man's back and room for his sword. Gaston slashed at the upturned face of a pock-marked ruffian who had crept beneath his horse to ham-string it. He killed his man with a stroke, another instantly took his place—faces grinned back at him everywhere—he beheld them to the right, to the left, in the ground beneath him and the sky above. Weakened by loss of blood, he believed that he was dying; and, reeling heavily, he

clutched old Jaincy's arm, and was by him dragged into the archway. The sounds now magnified terribly in his ears—a hell of voices screeched at him; he saw countless horrid visages and tried to thrust them back. He knew that he was losing consciousness, and presently without pain, and as a man dropping gently to slumber, he fell slowly from his horse and lay as one dead.

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CHAPTER XXII

A QUESTION OF HONOUR !

A STOVE burned in the room in which he awoke, and a quivering patch of crimson light shifting fitfully above him revealed a painted ceiling and a cornice once gilded but now forgotten. The footboard of a vast bed shut the lower panes of the windows from his sight ; but he perceived the glimmer of a lamp in the casement opposite ; and its poor wan light seemed to speak of the changing moments between twilight and darkness. The room itself wore an air of meagre splendour. An immense picture, whose figures would not shape clearly in the gloom, covered half the wall upon his left hand, the wall upon his right was destitute of any ornament save a small mirror with candelabras below it. A few high-backed chairs, a table inlaid with ivory, smaller tables set about at hazard, and a prim couch drawn nearer to the stove were the remaining items of a scant *ameublement*. But for the roar of the stove, like the breath of a desert wind, glowing without gusts, the silence was intense.

Count Gaston opened his eyes, but closed them

again immediately. He was not as yet able to bring his mind to any coherent thought ; and while he had some glimmering of the circumstances under which he had come to this house, the incidents of his coming were unknown to him, and he could remember neither the quarter of the city in which it was situated, nor the immediate circumstance which preceded the disaster. Gradually as he waked more surely from sleep and the coma of weakness, the story shaped itself anew for him. He remembered his argument with the Governor Balland, the address before the amphitheatre, the ride to the Duomo, and then the alley and the rout. Yes, he had gone down with old Jaincy trying to save him. He recollected slipping from his horse and trying to hold to the stirrup leather. He could have acted again the old Sergeant's frantic attempt to drag him up. Had he been a painter, his canvas would have caught many of the horrid visages which had surrounded him at the crisis. But the house ! He knew nothing of that. Who had brought him hither—why had he fainted ? Not yet wholly the master of his acts, a certain instinct led him to pass his hand over his body that he might find his hurt ; and so he discovered the heavy bandage about his shoulder and his wounded arm. An intolerable quickening pain broke his sleep utterly. He tried to sit up, but his strength was insufficient.

"You must not move, Count. Wait, I will bring a light."

A woman spoke, and he thought that he recognised the voice, a mellow, winning note, which

surely, he had heard in Venice. But he could not see the speaker ; and while he tried to identify her in his memory, his glance roved about the room again, and he perceived for the first time that the sofa near the stove was occupied by a strange old man, whose long angular face was capped by a square of black velvet and drawn to a fine point below by a beard of extraordinary length. Served by a little wooden table held between his knees, the old man had been in the act of arranging with methodical precision certain implements, a globe of the heavens, a quadrant and an hour-glass, which he dusted with nice fingers, and set one by one upon the board before him. When Gaston spoke he turned a thoughtful face toward the bed, but he did not utter a word ; and, presently, taking from the pocket of his vest a crystal phial, he held it to the light and peered at it as though it were a veritable elixir. Gaston found this face singularly interesting ; he watched every shadow of thought that fell upon it, and was thus engaged when a bright light glowed in the doorway of the room, and the mystery of his retreat vanished on the instant.

Bianca, Pesaro's daughter, for it was she who carried the candles, placed them upon the ivory table near the bed and then bent over it, so far that her raven locks almost touched Count Gaston's cheek. Feigning the greatest solicitude, she placed a cold hand upon his forehead, and having covered him anew with the heavy bedclothes she addressed herself to the old doctor as though speech with the sick man were forbidden.

"There is no fever, Felippi," she said. "We shall not need your drugs, then."

The old man shook his head and came over to the bed to stand there by her side. He had promised her that this stranger should die, and for death he waited with the appetite of vanity awakened.

"There will be fever before dawn," he rejoined, with the air of an infallible priest. "The signs are not to be denied. There will be fever."

"Then the signs shall cure it," she whispered vivaciously. "Hush, he is sleeping again."

Felippi stretched out a lean and withered hand and closed it upon Gaston's pulse.

"If there is no fever," he reiterated majestically, "there will be no crisis, and without crisis, Signorina, there will be no recovery. I cannot be deceived. I have buried fifty that were fitter to live than he. When we have taken his horoscope, the Divine guidance shall assist us. Until then I am but a helpless servant of the Fates."

Consoled by this profound reflection, he turned to the fireside and to that scheme of the horoscope which would presently be perfected. Gaston had heard every word of the promising duologue. He now opened his eyes and looked up at the dark face of Bianca, who still regarded him with that passionate interest which the girl was always unable to conceal.

"Signorina," he said, quietly, "if you would lend me your assistance, I think that I could succeed."

She shook her head, but her fingers closed, in

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Gaston finds himself in Bianca's home

stinctively, about the hand he stretched out to her, and she helped him to sit up as he wished.

"It is quite forbidden," she said, and then, to the old man, "Do you not insist, Felippi, the Count must not move?"

"If he would live, no, my child. Let him be patient—but I make no promises," he added reflectively.

Gaston found himself very weak from loss of blood, and his exertions left him faint and giddy.

"Give me a draught of wine and I will say that you are the cleverest physician in Verona," he began appealingly.

Bianca, pleased that he should ask anything of her, did not refer him to Felippi this time; she filled a goblet and held it to his lips, and when he had drunk a delicious draught he returned the goblet to her and asked a question.

"I have it in my mind that old Jaincy, the sergeant, brought me to this house," he suggested.

"No," she said, with a little gesture of triumph, "it was not Jaincy, Count."

"Then how was it? I remember nothing; my brains are gone, I think."

Bianca reflected for an instant and then told him her story.

"When you rode from the Castle this morning I was there, but you did not see me. I heard you address the people at the arena, and they told me you would pass my house on the way to the Duomo. So I hurried home and called my servants. Perhaps I thought that I could help you—I cannot tell you

honestly ; but when the men barricaded the Piazza, I knew that the time had come, and that something more than chance had sent me. Yes, I was glad to be the Count. My servants turned your sergeant's horse into the courtyard ; they did so at my orders. I was watching you from the window, although you did not see me."

He understood her, and asked after the others, though he fully expected what her answer would be.

"And my men—what of them, Signorina?"

She hid her face from him while she said—

"Sergeant Jaincy and three more have returned to the Castle."

"And the others——"

"Have not returned."

He knew that they were dead, and he sank back upon the pillow with a deep sigh, as a man who realises the cost of his failure. His promises to Balland this morning, his confidence, the talk of justice and fraternity—what were they worth now? Bonaparte would have the story in a few hours. He, Gaston de Joyeuse, chosen for this great trust, to be routed at the first essay by a rabble of the streets, humiliated before the people, the cause of France imperilled, the worn hope of the Veronese re-animated at the call of victory! And he himself, wounded and helpless in the house of one notorious for her hostility to France! He could not imagine a situation more humiliating. He had but one desire—to escape the house at any cost.

"If Jaincy has returned to the Castle," he exclaimed presently, "he went without hurt—is that so, Signorina?"

"With little hurt, Count. I thought that you would wish him to go."

He thought of it and then continued—

"The Governor Balland—did he leave a message for me, Signorina?"

"That you are to do nothing until your strength returns."

Gaston smiled grimly.

"He is most obliging and I am a cripple," he exclaimed with some pathos. Such a remark was not lost upon Bianca. He could not have told her more plainly that her house was his prison.

"A cripple who is, nevertheless, alive," she reminded him with a sufficient emphasis of rebuke to arrest his attention. He understood her and muttered a reluctant apology.

"Forgive me, Signorina—I had not forgotten. A sick man is slow in thanks, but he often feels more than those who talk more. Yes, I owe my life to you—I shall not forget it."

"Gratitude will find its best expression in obedience. Let me serve you—I will ask nothing more."

She sat upon the side of his bed and looked straight into his eyes. Her intense passion for this man could not be concealed. It quivered in the lustrous pupils of her jet-black eyes, upon her pouting lips, in the poise of her trembling hand. Had he looked her in the face at that moment she would have kissed his lips. But the heart of the man seemed to freeze as she spoke. Dependent as he was upon the charity of that house, for the very

life spared to him this day, he could not answer her otherwise.

"Signorina," he said, turning away his face, "I must return to my house—my honour compels me."

"Your honour, Count?"

"Yes, the honour which has put a barrier for ever between you and me."

"Does honour, then, forbid friendship?"

"There are circumstances when it does. Consider, I am the enemy of your people in this city."

She laughed scornfully, and, bending very low, she whispered—

"Does that make me any the less your friend? Put me to the proof. I can help you if I will."

"It would be dishonourable to permit it."

"Dishonourable! Does a woman who would give her life for a man think of dishonour?"

"Then the man must think for her. I shall leave your house to-night, Signorina."

"Listen," she said, as a gabbler who has but one chance remaining, and will be heard ere that is lost. "I care nothing for Italy if it does not give me happiness. The end is the same whatever the means. Bonaparte will come here and the Italians will go. I could aid him to come—yes, with secrets which would save the lives of thousands and help Italy as well as France. Why should I be silent? Why should you refuse to hear me? Do you care nothing for the lives of your countrymen? I will not believe it. You are as anxious as other men to

succeed and be thought well of. You want to humble Colonel Balland, and I can put it in your power to do so. I promise you this—yes, without condition, if you will not let me. I do not ask for your love—I will be your servant, your sister. God knows I can humble myself no more! Some day, perhaps, you will understand and thank me. I must hope for that. There is nothing else left to me."

She hid her face in her hands, ashamed that so much had been wrung from her. Gaston, upon his part, suffered for some instants a temptation like to none he had known—so subtle, so attractive, so playing upon his vanity that all his manhood could scarce resist it. One word of love to this beautiful girl would win him all that he had come to Verona to earn, a reputation for astuteness, for vigilance, for authority over the people. He was convinced that she could make her words good and sell him those secrets which would humble Balland and secure Verona finally for the French cause. Named for the staunchest of the Italians, what more natural than that she should be in possession of those plans and proposals by which the Veronese would expel the French from their city. So much occurred to him before his honour spoke. But it had no uncertain note when, after an instant of profound silence, he said to her—

"Signorina, if you could give me a kingdom, I would not listen to you——"

Bianca stood up, and looking at him for an instant pathetically, but without anger, she said—

"I shall, at least, hope. You cannot leave me if you would. You are my prisoner, Count. Time must be my friend."

So speaking she glided from the room and left him with the wild, fretful thoughts to which her words had given birth. The old physician, making sure that she had gone, crossed the floor stealthily, and, bending down his head until his goat's beard swept the coverlet, he said—

"There will be fever, but I can cure it, my son. My fee is a thousand ducats. Hush! I would have none hear us!"

Gaston nodded his head but did not speak. He was very weary, and anon he fell into a heavy sleep from which the sound of drums rolling and trumpets blaring awoke him in the early hours of day. He did not know it, but the fanfare he heard was blown for Beatrice de St. Remy as she entered Verona with Moreau's dragoons and was conducted by no less a person than Joseph Villetard himself to the house which Bonaparte had commanded to be prepared for her.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT THE BERNESE PALACE

THEY had assigned the Bernese Palace to her—that splendid fabric which lies close by the Church of St. Anastasia, and has been the home of many great names in the story of Verona. Hither came Joseph Villetard upon the third day after her arrival in the city. Besieged by the first of the French residents and such of the Veronese who associated her name with the social glories of Venice, Beatrice's position had been undisputed from the hour of her entry. The courtyard before her doors swarmed with messengers during the busier hours of the day. Her visitors were Cardinals, Bishops, Prefects, Proveditores—the officers of the garrison, such of the nobles as remained to resist the French, the great women of the city whom Bonaparte had humbled. These people, hearing of her mission and that all social dominion had been entrusted to her, thrust themselves in upon her like sheep that have found a shepherd. Each desired that she would further his cause and hinder the cause of his neighbour. They had a score of remedies for the mis-

fortunes of Verona, and vied one with the other in advocating their views. To all these Beatrice lent an ear which, as yet, could scarce distinguish one sound of diplomacy from another. The flight, the wild ride from Bovoleta, perhaps the humiliation of her surrender, dazed her intellect, or it left her strangely excited. She had ridden to the city, believing that she would find Gaston upon its threshold; and now when three days had passed and no word from him, no messenger had come to her, her amazement was too real to permit either disbelief or the abasement of the question, "Why?" There was some trick, some trap, she thought; and her wit should master it.

She had begun her task upon the third day when, at the hour of eight o'clock in the evening, the Chevalier Villetard entered the Palace determined to tell her that Gaston de Joyeuse, her lover, was the willing prisoner of Bianca, Pesaro's daughter. Never had the lean-jowled Joseph rolled upon his tongue a piece of news which so delighted him. He came to the Palace with Balland, the Governor, and they talked of it from the citadel to the very doors of the great *salon* in which Beatrice received her guests.

"By the body of Zeno, he went off like a barb," Balland had said; "there was I with my tongue in my cheek, there was he half-way to the Duomo, before a man could crack a nut. 'God go with you,' said I; 'and may your soul rest in Paradise this night.' Ay, and he would have been, Chevalier, but for the woman—there's always a woman—who

clapped her hand on his bridle rein and defied the carrion to touch her. She's got him now in the Piazza Reno, and the Lord send that she keeps him for me."

So this amiable Balland made n bones about it, and the Chevalier, relishing his frankness, was not a whit behind him.

"My friend Gaston has many qualities," he remarked with satisfaction; "but he has yet to learn how to wait. This angel Bianca deserves our thanks. If she will keep our fire-eater a prisoner until the work is done, Balland, I will even make love to her myself. Understand, I would not have any harm come to him—no, certainly not. We are old friends. If age is ever a good thing, it is good in friendship. I shall take care of Gaston when the time comes; but he must not visit this house—at least not yet."

They exchanged glances as two that understood each other very well indeed. Balland had already heard something of my lady's story; and although he was not yet wholly in Villetard's confidence, he began to see the goal at which the Chevalier aimed.

"By all account in Venice, these were two for the priests' shearing," he remarked jocularly. "If that is so, you will need a long crook to keep them apart, Villetard. But I suppose you know what you are doing."

"No one better, my dear Balland. I will wager you a hundred crowns that our friend the Marquise cuts him dead to-morrow. Therein you observe the value and precise place of woman in the scheme of things. You have trouble with one of them—

very well ; make friends with another, and you are out of the wood directly. I confess that fortune has aided me very wonderfully. My nicest calculations were not based on this. He is led to the angel's door with a pike through his shoulder. Fate understands her business, my dear Balland, when she will condescend to do it."

"No doubt, no doubt," rejoined Balland, whose rude practice was rarely based upon anything but brute force. "Set one woman against another, or, better still, clap the pair of them in a cage together. That is my rule, Villetard. Trust them just as far as you can see them, and have a rope round them all the time. I would rely upon nothing less if I were you. We're going to have trouble ; and the fewer women mixed up in it the better."

"I agree with you, Balland. When the day comes, it will be for men. Let the women do the sowing ; I will reap the crop."

"They'll sow dragon's teeth, if you'll let them, Count."

"Any kind of teeth that will bite, my friend ; it is all the same to me. What we need, Balland, is a rising against our people here—which will compel Bonaparte to send us a division. The day for talk has gone by. I am callous, admittedly. Some of my countrymen must die in Verona. I regret it, but am unable to prevent it. You and I and our friends with us will occupy a convenient window on that occasion. We shall deplore the misfortunes of our wretched victims, and cry to Heaven and to Bonaparte for revenge. Our position before Europe will

be justified, if that is anything to us, and Venice will fall. Do you not perceive, Colonel, how much Madame la Marquise can help us in this task? She is to come here to promote a good understanding with the French—why? Because she is in love with one of them. I turn her love to jealousy, and what follows? Are you too little acquainted with the history of women to imagine?"

He laughed softly to himself, while Balland stood a moment in the courtyard of the house, and, striking the palm of his hand with a huge fist, he exclaimed—

"By Heaven, Villetard, you are the very devil!"

Villetard had been likened too often to the Prince of Darkness that he should plume himself over much at this further compliment. He permitted his cloak to drop back, however, and followed Balland up the great staircase a little proudly. It had been very dark on the piazza without, but here in the Palace a blaze of light shone out from innumerable candelabras of the finest glass; while footmen, in smart blue liveries and canary breeches, were almost as abundant as the guests themselves. The superb marble staircase shimmered with variegated colours, to which the uniforms of French officers, the clinging and almost transparent gowns of the women and high banks of luscious roses lent their aid. Many dialects were heard from the lips of those who pushed their way up through this seething press; but French was the prevailing language, and those who spoke it carried themselves more jauntily and with a finer assurance than the Italians, who

could not but feel that their enemies surrounded them.

The Governor Balland, with Villetard at his heel, thrust the people aside with little civility, and was not slow to claim that precedence to which his rank entitled him—indeed, the Governor's bulk would have made a road for itself anywhere; and puffing and pushing and answering all salutations with a curt nod, he found himself presently upon the threshold of the *salon*, and espied Beatrice at its further end, receiving her guests like an acknowledged queen come suddenly into her kingdom.

"Is that she?" he whispered to Villetard, as a man who is pleasantly surprised. "Well, she's a shapely creature, I must say. Buy a thick rope, my boy; you'll want it by and by."

"No," said Villetard, shrewdly, "I shall lead her by a thread."

Beatrice, in truth, had never looked so well. Believing in her heart that Gaston would certainly visit her to-night, she had denied herself no ornament to which her riches and her name entitled her. Her gown was that same robe of gold and silver and the finest tissue in which she had received Monsieur le Comte de Provence in Venice nearly a year ago. Her jewels had been the treasure of the Zorzi family for generations. Among them were to be found rubies from Hungary, emeralds, the emblem of friendship, a crown of diamonds from the Indies, sapphires whose rays endowed her restless arms with a gift of changing rays. And to cap all, the Golden Rose, which had come down through the

ages as the jewel of her house and the seal of its faith.

My lady stood in a vast room, whose painted ceiling was almost hidden by the lustres below it, and the thousand candles which gave it ornament. About her on either hand were scarlet-robed Cardinals, Bishops in their purple, Canons of the Duomo in their capes; Emili, the commander of the scanty armies of Italy; Verità, that gentle old man who had striven so hard for peace and the salvation of Verona; John Baptiste-Malenza, one of the wisest of the sages. These grouped themselves as though to protect her and the city whom she represented from that babbling horde of French officers never at the pains to hide their disdain or to accept the situation otherwise than as a jest. As by some proper instinct it befell that the French were gathered together upon the right-hand side of the *salon* and the Italians upon the left; and while every one talked of the most trivial things, few thought of anything else but the reality. Here were allies, and yet the width of the room divided them. Peace reigned in Verona, but men whispered beneath their breath, "Will there be battle to-morrow?" The one man who could have joined these links of a broken chain lay absent in the house of Bianca, Pesaro's daughter.

Now Beatrice had espied Villetard at the door, and the Governor Balland with him; and she beckoned him at once with her fan, as though welcoming a friend. When he had shaken hands with her, and presented the Governor, she intro-

duced him to Cardinal Zeno, and to the other Bishops and dignitaries ; and for a little while they conversed with engaging deception. Both were aware, however, that it was but a pretence ; and when the opportunity came, my lady turned aside and asked the Chevalier that question which had so greatly agitated her since she arrived at Verona.

"Where is the Count ?" she said. "What is keeping him ?"

Villetard, who had been expecting this all along, assumed the air of a man who speaks with distressing reluctance.

"My dear Marquise," he protested, "I thought you would have known."

"Known ? But, my dear Chevalier, what is there to have known ?"

"I would sooner you asked some one else, Marquise. Remember, I was Gaston's friend."

She opened her pretty eyes to their widest although trying to realise the nature of her misfortune.

"Then something has happened to him !" she cried.

"As you say, something has happened to him."

"He is hurt, ill——"

"Worse than that, Marquise."

She had been prepared for news of misfortune but at this covert suggestion my lady's face lost its colour, and she leaned back heavily upon the arm of the great gold chair.

"I beg you to be plain—what can be worse than his illness ?"

"His indiscretion, Marquise."

It was but an indiscretion, then. The colour returned to her face.

"Oh, then we are all guilty, if indiscretion be our crime, Chevalier."

"I differ from you, Marquise. We are guilty only when our indiscretions are discovered."

"Then, what has Gaston done—why are you so mysterious?"

"I wish to spare you. You will hear of it soon enough."

"Indeed, Chevalier, do nothing of the kind. Do you not see that I am utterly at a loss?"

"Exactly in the same position as our dear friend. He is utterly at a loss."

"For what, Monsieur Villetard?"

"For eighty hussars, my dear Marquise. Your lovers of liberty killed them three days ago."

Her face was troubled, for she realised quickly that some disgrace had come upon Gaston.

"Have I not sufficient claim upon you that you should be plain with me?" she reiterated.

The Chevalier put his hand gently upon her arm and touched it with his bony fingers.

"I am trying to be kind to you," he said; "but if you wish it——"

"Oh, have done, Chevalier; let me know——"

He shrugged his shoulders and looked away when he spoke.

"Our friend Gaston is a hot-head," he remarked with apparent carelessness. "He tries to ride down the prejudices of a century with a squadron of

hussars. Oh, yes, he would have made an amiable bishop, if you count the scandal as nothing. He goes to the market-place and prates like a monk in Lent. Here's an end of it all. Just snap your fingers so, and we'll have peace and justice and fraternity to-morrow. The mob does not agree with him, and he knocks the people's heads together to put sense into them. They fire their muskets because they are light-hearted. Some of them are so joyous that they pile up the dead bodies in the street to prevent our friend returning to us. Gaston is taken in a *cul-de-sac*, and his men die in the gutter because his doctrine is at fault. Down go the chanters like ninepins; our dear friend would have followed them but for an amiable lady who has some interest in him. I wonder if you know her name?"

Beatrice turned on him a flashing glance which seemed to search him through.

"If you will tell me the name I will answer you," she said.

He continued to look away from her, and went on—

"Yes, I think you must know her, for we have spoken of her before—Bianca, the daughter of old Pesaro."

"You know that I know her—what then?"

"Then?—oh, there is no then, Marquise. Gaston could not come to us to-night because he is at her house."

The words were uttered with an air of abstraction and indifference which Joseph Villetard could assume

so easily. He did not venture to look at Beatrice for some minutes after they were spoken, but when next he caught her glance she was speaking across him and smiling at the Cardinal Zeno.

"Yes," she said, all her dignity remaining to her, "they are about to announce supper, my Lord. Will you show us the way?"

Musicians in a distant gallery now began to play a lilting Hungarian dance. The doors dividing the *salon* from the banqueting hall behind it were thrown wide open and groaning tables disclosed. My lord the Cardinal, preceded by candle-bearers, his train supported by pages, led the way to the supper-room; and my lady followed him upon Villetard's arm.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ESCAPE

GASTON knew nothing of Beatrice's arrival in Verona, and those who guarded him in the old house by the Duomo were at some pains to keep the information from him. He had received an ugly wound in the shoulder and lost much blood; but a healthy youth remained to him, and he quickly began to rally and to reward Bianca for her devoted vigilance. Day by day, she entered his room to find him more wakeful at her coming and readier to listen to her gossip and her wit. If there was no further reference upon her part to that unwomanly declaration which passed and was from her, she betrayed her love in a hundred ways which ministered to the patient's comfort, and could not but find him grateful. The old surgeon, Felippi, he appeared to pass his life in the corner by the stove, whence he would emerge to utter various pious platitudes and to plain what he would have done if he had appeared upon the scene. His cryptic proposals made upon the evening of the first day were not repeated. He sat dumb

the path of the ... holding his phial to the
droning blaze, but ... the drugs to no ...

The day passed slowly enough for Gaston,
though all too quickly for the devoted Bianca.
The Count slept but little during the first week
of his ... eful captivity, and in the silent watches
of the night he would recall the old days in Venice,
the brilliant hours of *fête* and carnival—upon
the waters and peril within the house. ... mem-
bered how he had first seen Beatrice in ... chapel
of the cathedral; his admiration of her beauty and
the awe with which her intellectual gifts ... red
him. He did not love her then—he knew ... now;
but she had taught him the sweetest lesson of his
life, and he could imagine no future which did not
concern her. In Bianca's house he did not dare to
ask if Beatrice had come to Verona; but his anxiety
grew upon him from day to day, and as his strength
returned his resolution to depart grew stronger
with it.

Now, Bianca was aware of that which was passing
in her prisoner's mind, and she showered upon him
those lavish attentions which so please the sick and
are the true antidote to pain. There were roses in
Gaston's room always, roses and sweet perfumes
and the fruit and the flowers he loved. An open
casement, to which his bed was drawn, allowed
him a glimpse of the narrow street below with
the odd figures of citizen and peasant and of the
soldiers of France. Over the red roofs there was
a vista of hill and valley, and sleepy hamlets, and
the winding river dreaming in the sunshine. Gaston

passed long hours by this window listening to Bianca as she read to him the old folk-tales and the gallant stories of mediæval Italy; and if his ears caught few of her words, it was because the spirit of the narrative awakened in him bitter thoughts, and he would reflect upon his own humiliation, the sorry figure he had cut in his first essay and all that his resumption of the soldier's life must cost him. Bonaparte, he feared, would never trust him again. Such a man never condoned failure. He, Gaston, must lay down his command and go back to France a discredited man. He asked himself if Beatrice would follow him thither. He believed that she would, while he rebelled against the necessity of asking her to share an exile so discreditable. It might have been very different had fate been a little kind to him.

They were reading "Don Quixote" to-day, for their library had but a score of books all told; and the gentle Bianca, her black hair tossed back in raven locks from her snow-white forehead, sat upon a low stool and rested her chin upon the counterpane of the bed. Old Felippi, meanwhile, drowsed in his favourite corner, not in any way grateful for the warm sunshine or the breath of the spring wafted down from the verdant hills. The hum of voices in the street without, distant music in a *café*, the still air, the kindly day fostered that dreamy air with which the girl read and the man listened to her silvery voice. She was reciting the fable of Basilius, who married Quinteria "fo

his soul's sake," and, pleased by the narrative, she pursued it eagerly until the ruse was declared and the sick man made whole by love. Then, for a little while, she rested, and, observing Gaston's distraction, she chided him for it.

"Why should I read to you, Count, when you do not listen?"

The Count started up from his reverie, and answered her with confusion.

"Why do you say that I am not listening, Signorina?"

"Because your eyes are closed," she persisted. "You do not even know what I am reading about."

"Pardon me, it is the story of a very foolish fellow who so little understood love that he thought it had to do with his soul's health."

"And has it not?" she asked him eagerly. "Is there no sacrifice, then, in love?"

"Absolutely none, Signorina. We please ourselves with an indifference to consequences which is the cause of much of our unhappiness. Sacrifice should never be confused with love; love does not exist when sacrifice is demanded. Friendship is something very different. The sacrifices to friendship are sacred. There is no one more conscious of them than myself just now."

Bianca reflected upon it for a spell, resting her chin upon the pillow and looking almost straight into Gaston's eyes.

"I have forbidden you to thank me for anything," she exclaimed, anticipating a new protestation of

his gratitude. "You know that it has given me happiness to have you here. Why do you make me speak of it? There is no sacrifice to friendship in my case—no, I do not believe in devoted women and all that stuff! Woman's devotion is never logical. You came to me because you could not help it, and I nursed you because I wanted to. There's the bargain as I see it, and I don't deceive myself. You will not forget it all when you leave this house, and that's what you ought to do. I don't say that you will not think of me a little kindly; but it must begin and end there. Something tells me, Count, that we shall never meet again when you leave this house. I am just like one over whom a great misfortune is hanging, and I can do nothing to avert it. You are to go away to France, and I am to marry another man—yes, of course: my father will insist upon that, and I shall not refuse. Then where's the friendship? Do you believe that a wife should have friends? I do not, and that is why they call me original. No, I shall marry and dream away my life in Florence or Rome, and all this will be just the day that was. It is better so for us both."

Tears glistened in her eyes, though her courage forbade weeping; and Gaston, touched with the pity of it all, could say nothing to contradict or console her. Yes, it were better so, he thought. If, at one time, his judgment had led him to the belief that Bianca's devotion owed much to a more romantic fancy which time would dispel, he was now willing to concede to it something more

womanly and touching. He understood that she loved him, as these Southrons love, with all the ardour and abandon of their race. And he knew that his honour demanded his departure from her house at the very first moment such departure was possible.

"Do you expect your father's return soon, Signorina?" he asked her, desiring to avoid the more intimate confession; "I had expected to find him here on my arrival from Bovoleta," he added truthfully.

"He is at Venice," Bianca said without interest. "I had a letter yesterday in which he spoke of coming to-morrow or the next day. Let me be frank, Count; I do not wish you to meet my father—not here. You will understand why, for you have known him in Venice."

"I understand it perfectly, Signorina; your father does not love my countrymen. I am thrice unfortunate in that my duty compels me to oppose him so often. But I am hoping much from time—yes, I am asking myself as I lie here how I can serve you and your house when the day comes."

"A day which will give my country to Bonaparte," she said with bitterness. "Do you think that Francis Pesaro will accept the help of any Frenchman on that day, Count?"

"I do not despair of it. Your father is too wise, Signorina, to charge the individual with the deeds of the nation. If there should be an evil day for Venice, I will save him and his house—for his daughter's sake."

"The evil day has fallen already," she rejoined. "My father would never value fortune which came to him from his country's ills. No, Count; you must not think of us. If we have done our duty, we can leave the rest to God."

He did not contradict her, for her words had awakened in him a train of thought more disquieting, even, than the avowal of her love. A week ago, he said, she had been willing to sell him her countrymen's secrets, to barter and traffic with them for the gratification of a romantic passion. But to-day she could speak of the Divine pleasure and of human sacrifice. Of the two minds, he named the latter for Bianca's own; and he began to understand how very greatly she must have been tempted when she offered to betray her friends and would have done so at a word from him. His resolve to leave her house grew upon him hourly. Had his strength been such that he could have gone without assistance, he would not have remained another day; but every attempt to rise from his bed had been attended hitherto by giddiness and such alarming weakness that he was afraid to trust himself even yet; and so, short of appealing directly to the charity of Balland, he could imagine no way of escape. Against this course, his pride rebelled stoutly, and he was quite frank about it and spoke of it to old Felippi when Bianca had left him.

"Doctor," he said, "I must leave this house to-day."

The old man had been warming his bony fingers

by the stove when Gaston spoke, and he looked up with a far from pleasant smile upon his cunning face.

"My son," he said, "pray to the angels to lend you wings. You know that it is impossible."

"I do not see that it is impossible," rejoined the Count petulantly. "Send to the Governor Balland with my compliments and say that I must see him."

Old Felippi stretched out his hands to the fire again and let his head sag upon his breast.

"You speak like a child," he rejoined. "Do you forget whose house this is?"

"It is the house of Francis Pesaro, the Senator. What then, old man?"

Felippi continued—

"Yes, the house of Francis Pesaro, whose servants so little understand their duty that they will open the gate to the soldier who is to win Verona for the French!"

His meaning was quite clear, although he uttered the words without emotion. Pesaro's servants understood perfectly the value of the prisoner they had trapped. They abetted their mistress, Bianca, in her desire to keep him—and if the truth surprised Gaston very much, well, said old Felippi, a wiser man would have divined it sooner.

"Do you mean to tell me that I am not free to come and go as I please?" the Count asked angrily.

Felippi agreed to that.

"As far as she is concerned," he said, enigmatically, "the house and all that is in it are yours; but

there are others, Count, servants of my master. Ask them if they will let you go."

"What do they gain, then, by keeping me?"

"What do they gain? Does not your vanity answer the question? They gain the shrewdest head in Verona; and they profit by its mistakes, Count. Such a man, they say, will not trip a second time."

"Ha!" cried Gaston, "then they prefer my friend Balland?"

"You have said it—they prefer your friend Balland."

"And they act at their discretion."

"No, at the discretion of their master, who will be with us to-morrow."

"I shall see him at once; he is, really, a very foolish man," persisted Gaston. "Consider, my friends will crack his door like an egg-shell if I lift a finger—a word from this window to the first trooper who passed, and what then? A child would be wiser!"

Felippi was on his feet at this, resenting the loud tones and quite ready with his alternative.

"Hush!" he cried, raising his finger warningly. "A word to the trooper, yes; and so to your friend Balland. Will he listen to you? You do not know men if you say so. No, my son; we must find another way, we must open another door." He was speaking into Gaston's ear now, and his voice sank almost to a whisper.

"Give me your bond for a thousand ducats and will set you free this night," he went on, his avarice

flogging his tongue. "Do not wait until Pesaro returns. Your life may be the price of that."

Gaston answered without an instant's hesitation.

"I will give you the bond when you will."

He slept that day a heavy sleep, aided thereto by Felippi's drugs. When he awoke, it seemed to him that much of his old strength had returned, and he realised that he had suffered not a little in the preceding days from the dotard's studied procrastination. His head was clearer now, and he raised himself in his bed without assistance, and was not afraid to stand alone. The darkness of the room, however, forbade any attempt to put his strength to the proof; and although his heart beat high in the hope of freedom, he did not, for the moment, dare any further experiment. For that matter, some little reaction followed upon his haste, and he lay back upon the bed wearily speculating as to the meaning of old Felippi's promises, and wondering if they would be fulfilled.

He had opened the casement above him when first he awoke, and now he tried to glean of the city's voice some tidings of the hour and of events. A patch of clear grey sky, gloriously mapped out by a myriad golden stars, seemed to exalt him and to lift him up as from some valley of darkness to celestial freedom. He found himself indulging in a contempt for mere human limitations which contemplation of the Infinite never fails to provoke. Upon the other side, and warring against this ecstasy of the night were uncouth sounds from

the street below ; the tipsy songs of revellers turning out of the *cafés* ; the tramp of the guard upon its way to the gates ; the note of a harp and of a woman's voice ; the silver bells heralding the new day. These led him to carry his mind back to the hour when he had entered Verona with such satisfaction and had believed that conciliation would save the city and its people. Nor would he admit that anything had happened which should change that opinion. If his strength were given back to him, he believed that the wisdom of his idea must bring French and Veronese together ultimately in an alliance by which both should profit. What he feared was the indiscretions of passion, let them be the brutalities of Balland or the mad anger of the mob rising in arms against an arrant power which demanded the right to guide its destinies. Yes, he believed he could save Verona even yet if this ancient Felippi were as good as his word.

There was not a sound in the house even for a soldier's ear ; and the rush-light usually placed by the stove had not been kindled to-night. Gaston remembered how that Felipe had spoken of possible danger to himself, not from Bianca's headstrong passion, but from the servants of Francis Pesaro, Bonaparte's strongest enemy in Venice. It was quite possible, he thought, that Pesaro's dependents would wish to hold Bonaparte's emissary a prisoner, at least until the master's return. But when he had said this, he was still at a loss, and found himself unable to indicate what advantage could accrue to them from su-

a clumsy proceeding. At the worst his confinement could be but a matter of days. Bianca, herself, did he appeal to her, would contrive some scheme for his release; and in any case, he could not imagine how the city was better served for having Balland for its Governor. Such matters perplexed him not a little! and being almost convinced that old Felippi was but a vain boaster, he determined to sleep again and wait for day. This he did for a full hour, and when next he awoke, there was a light in the room, and Felipe himself stood by his bed. The Count could not see the old man's face, but he could hear his voice buzzing in his ears like the rush of blood in the veins.

"Not a word, if you value your life, Count! Pesaro has returned and all is known. Obey me without question—the minutes are precious."

Gaston raised himself up in his bed and stared about him with sleepy eyes. It now appeared that the old doctor's face was completely hidden by the folds of a heavy cloak which fell almost to the ground at his feet. A lantern, hidden by the same veil, was disclosed anon, and set down upon a table near the stove, where its wan light showed pens, ink, and paper already prepared. Felippi was no longer alone; a youth, in the garb of a well-to-do citizen, watched and waited upon him in faithful docility; and, in truth, Gaston had never seen the old man so active. It was almost grotesque to watch him darting from place to place, or measuring his drugs, or listening for any sounds from the rooms below, and one might have said that he was

like nothing so much as some weird figure of a painter's dreams called in the silent hours to a dreadful task. His very activities witnessed the hidden danger he feared; and he worked unceasingly as though the house below had been full of armed men whom one word would have summoned to the stairs-head. It was the woman, however, rather than the man whom old Felippi feared.

"Drink," he said pleasantly to Gaston, proffering a long glass, which he had first held up to the light like one who judges by colour, and not by the palate. "You have need of all that I can do for you."

The Count drained the glass, and instantly became conscious of an abnormal exhilaration, a false sense of strength and vigour, such as he had experienced when first waking from his long sleep.

"You are a magician!" he exclaimed under his breath; "you give me wings!"

"But I take payment for them," the old man rejoined. "Here is the bond, Count—when you have signed it we will go."

Gaston stood on his feet for the second time since he had fallen in the doorway of the house. His head swam; the lantern's light danced before his eyes, but he was able, notwithstanding, to cross the room to the table and to sign the bond.

"I walk like a clown on Schiavoni," he said with a laugh. "Well, there is your bond, doctor."

"I will present it at the Castle in three days' time. There will be a new Governor then—eh?"

well. But we have no time to lose. Here, Pietro ; help my lord the Count to dress." And then, with a white face and a startled cry, he muttered, "Mother of God ! what was that ?"

The three listened, spellbound and motionless. Some one moved in the house below. They heard a footfall upon the stair very distinctly and ominously, and they said that a man was coming up step by step to the room. The weird sound chained old Felippi to the spot as by a link of steel. His head was thrown back ; his eyes stared from his head ; he seemed to be counting the steps one by one, with mumbling lips and sagging jaw. A louder alarm brought the sweat to his forehead. The man below, whoever he was, had dropped something, and they heard it go clattering down as steel jangling upon a marble pavement. Then the footsteps ceased. There was no further alarm.

"It was Pesaro's step !" cried the old man, breaking the silence at last. "We do not wish to hear it twice, Count. Please to dress. Pietro, help my lord."

Excitement is often as good a drug as any known to the physicians ; and so the Count found it in these fleeting moments when peril hovered so near to him. His first giddiness and distress were forgotten in that greater desire for liberty and the freedom of the streets ; and he began to move about the room, unconscious that he had been so long its helpless prisoner. When he was dressed, Felippi covered the lantern with his cloak, and

casting one quick glance behind him to be sure that nothing was forgotten, he bade the others follow ; and they went, one by one, up a narrow flight of stairs which led to the roof of the house. This they gained without further alarm ; but it was not until they were out upon the leads that they breathed a full breath and began to believe in their achievement.

"Where now ?" the Count asked, a little dubiously—he was not sure of Felippi even yet. "Your ducats were easily earned, old man. Set me on the ground and I will say you are the cleverest surgeon in Italy !"

He was strangely elated ; the high place, the twinkling lights in the streets below, the cool, fresh breezes from the hills, strength returning—here was food enough to nerve a man for any venture. That he had escaped Bianca's house was the lesser thing to him. With freedom, his ambitions came back to him as upon a freshet of hope and determination. Yes, he would surprise old Balland this very night. There should be no delay. Verona must learn at dawn the name of its new Governor. He would re-win the right to command. Not a second time should they charge him with indiscretion or with compromise. He would teach these people a lesson which should remain with them to the end. Well, he thought, that this old surgeon knew nothing of his intention. Quack as he was, possibly charlatan, some spark of patriotism must lurk with him. And if it were fanned to a flame, what then ? Gaston's

impatience responded to this new argument, while old Felippi watched him with half-closed eyes.

"The way lies yonder, Count," the old man mumbled as he passed the lantern to the youth. "Pass three houses and you are upon the roof of the Church of St. Anastasia. The door of the campanile is open—I have so arranged it with the sacristan. This lad here will let you out by the western porch. Go, and God be with you!"

"Then you are not accompanying me, Felippi?"

"My Lord, the race is to the young. You will find a coach at the church door. Do not let them say that we delayed."

He covered his head with his cloak and disappeared as he had come. If Gaston suspected treachery, suspicion would scarcely help him at such a time. He determined to follow the youth and to leave the rest to chance.

"You are the servant of Dr. Felippi," he said to the lad as they went. The answer was—

"I am his son."

"Then he has spoken of me to you, Pietro?"

The lad shook his head.

"My father is a silent man, Signore."

"Good; that is the man I like. Are you quite sure of your way, Pietro?"

"A child could find it, Signore. Look, here is the church. We have but to step across this parapet and we are upon its roof. We shall not need the lantern much longer now. Please be careful—the steps are narrow. That house yonder,

where the lights are, has been given to the Marquise de St. Remy, who arrived here a few days ago. They call it the Bernese Palace, Count."

Gaston said not a word. He remained staring at the house as though a spectre were at its doors.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MEETING IN THE CHURCH

SHE had come to Verona, then, as Bonaparte had promised she should come. If he, Gaston, had doubted, it was not doubt of my lady but of his messenger. Perhaps fidelity rebuked his incredulity, and he asked himself how many of his waking hours had been given to thoughts of Beatrice and that which must have befallen her in the days of their separation. True, Bonaparte had offered him no alternative, saying simply "Go"; and he obeyed with a soldier's instinct. He did not blame himself for that; but the charge of his doubt remained. He had not believed that Beatrice would so bear witness to her love that she would follow him to the gate of Verona and confess it beyond any possibility of question. Her presence both agitated and chided him—and then came the sudden awakening when he remembered his captivity, the figure of the passionate Bianca and the return her devotion had won from him. Yes, Beatrice would certainly have heard of his misfortune; and he

imagined that the wily Balland would make the most of it ; in which case the whole story had been told both of the emeute and its aftermath. Gaston was chagrined that Beatrice should hear of his being in Bianca's house ; and he determined to see her without loss of time. He believed that he could explain everything to her, and yet a certain doubt remained. Herein, it may be, his own conscience accused him, and he was willing to admit that he could have terminated his captivity more quickly if he had been desirous of doing so.

These thoughts passed through his mind in a whirl of self-reproach and confession while he stood upon the roof of the Campanile and watched the lights in the Bernese Palace, where my lady slept. Such false strength as old Felippi's drugs had lent him waned with the mental effort almost more rapidly than with the physical ; and a sudden giddiness awoke him from his reverie and sent him with lurching steps toward the narrow staircase, upon which the youth was already waiting. Here he caught the lad's hand and bade him hasten, and, step by step, pausing now and again for rest and breath, they descended the tower and gained the lower door. There was a leather curtain at this point dividing the nave from the belfry porch, and the two were about to pass it when a whispering of voices and the flicker of a lantern's light held them back, silent and alert ; and they waited utterly perplexed at such an unlooked-for turn. Strange and dangerous as the times were in Verona, the presence of men in the church at such an hour of the night

THE MEETING IN THE CHURCH 331

boded no good to any that might intrude upon them ; and the Count instantly made a signal to the lad to extinguish his lantern ; and when this was done, he stood with bent ear to count the footsteps. They passed slowly, shuffling and hesitating in the darkness ; and when they had passed others succeeded to them ; the rays of lanterns danced upon the gloomy walls of the narthex and men's voices were heard. It was plain that the church was full of men—that they were holding there one of those clandestine meetings of the citizens which all the watchfulness of the French governors was unable to put down.

The Count realised this in a flash, but his brain was slower to understand the subtle villainy which had sent him to this place. It was old Felippi's doing without question. The old rogue had planned it all from the beginning ; the story of Pesaro's return, the lies about the servants—a child should have seen through them. Gaston blamed himself for his folly, but he was too weak physically to suffer any real fear ; and peril quickened his faculties. Where another man would have turned and gone as he had come, he determined both to hear and to see.

"So this is the silent man's work," he said to the lad at his side, "this is the coach at the door, Messer Pietro——"

Pietro did not answer him ; the lad was honestly afraid ; he knew nothing of the conspiracy, and did not share his father's confidence. The danger sent him headlong up the stairs again.

"For God's sake, come back, my Lord!" he cried. But the Count did not move; he had no strength to climb the steps again, nor did his inclination help him. Perhaps he believed himself to be safer in the church than out upon the conspicuous leads; and he heard the lad's stealthy footsteps with indifference. Better to stand alone, he thought, if curiosity were to reward him this night; and so, drawing the curtain a little way back, he peered round the edge of it and perceived his danger fully.

The nave of the church was wholly dark save for such feeble crimson rays as the altar lamps cast upon wall and buttress. High up above the massive pillars, grey patches upon a maze of lines stood for the painted windows and their saintly figures; but the darkness below was intense and so general that nothing could be seen, not even the outline of stall and bench. Here, in the nave, the intensity of the night reigned supreme; and the silence and mystery of it contrasted sharply with the murmur of voices which broke in upon the ear from a chapel near the great altar. One less master of himself than Gaston de Joyeuse might have surrendered something of his self-possession to this weird sobbing of sounds, now like the whisper of summer breezes, now broken like the voice of storm; but the Count cared little for human tongues, and less for any that might not be human; and when it was plain to him that a number of men had met there for some purpose, inimical, he did not doubt, to the peace of the city, he left his hiding-place without delay and began to creep up the nave towards the distant chapel.

THE MEETING IN THE CHURCH 333

Adroitly, as a man used to ambuscades, he felt his way with wary footsteps, understanding that a false step would betray him, and wondering, it may be, why one who had so little strength to spare should not husband it for freedom. But he held on doggedly in spite of his own arguments; and coming quite close to the chapel, he knelt by the screen which divided it from the nave; and there he both heard and saw the men.

There were thirty at a hazard in the chapel, and they had grouped themselves about a little pulpit, from the step of which a burly citizen addressed them in a low voice, but with an earnestness which was almost tragic. Tapers burning before a picture cast a yellow glow upon the speaker's face as upon a living canvas which time and the light had mellowed and toned in the softest shades; while elsewhere lanterns set upon the marble pavement gave outlines to little groups or framed the faces of those who understood that detection and death went hand in hand. None moved or spoke while the citizen addressed his audience; the voice rose and fell in a momentous wailing lament, finding both theme and text in that bitter denunciation of the French which was then the complaint of every tongue. When he had done, and the echo of sudden applause died away in the ghostly vault, another took his place and began to speak of things more vital and more dangerous than any racial hostility. This man remembered that the Marquise de St. Remy was to give a banquet to the French officers in Verona at the Bernese Palace on the

following evening. "If you have the courage," he said, "you will know how to act. Rid yourself of these vermin and the end is near. You can do it if you will. Let none leave the Palace alive ; let none tell the tale."

He went on shrewdly to point out to them that if they needed precedent, the French themselves had found it for them. "How many thousands have died in France for freedom?" he asked them. "How many fell at the doors of the Abbaye prison? What was the life of Louis of France accounted when it stood between a nation and her liberties? Were they to be craven when courage would save them? For his own part, he would kill a Frenchman with as little thought as he would kill a dog. "Our homes, our children, cry for vengeance," he put it to them; and, catching up his words, the passion of their race aroused them, and many a sword was drawn from its scabbard, and many a voice cried, "So let it be!" Gaston, listening by the screen, shivered before such a ferocity of hate and lust. What would be his case if any stumbled upon him as he lay in hiding there? He would not think of it; but drawing closer, he crouched and listened to a new outburst; and was still bent down with ear intent when he became aware, without hearing it or seeing it, not by any faculty of sense, but by the simplest instinct of peril, that a man stood at his side and watched him. That, he said afterwards, was the most dreadful moment he had ever lived through.

The Count rose to his feet slowly, and turned

about inch by inch to face the stranger. He believed that this man would kill him, and could not understand what kept the blow back. The torture of suspense racked him beyond any fear of death or the knife ; and with this was a sense of the supernatural, as though some figure of the unknown mysteries had been conjured out of the shades for his destruction. Not a word, not a sign came from the cloaked man ; he stood like the personification of destiny, motionless, rigid ; and, as he stood, the Count realised the truth. This man was playing his own rôle ; they were spies together ; detection would mean as much to one as to the other ; they were gamblers, and the stake was death. Such an odd encounter had, surely, never been before. And yet it was not odd since devotion to a woman had sent them both to the place ; but this the Count had yet to learn.

For a full five minutes the two men stood shoulder to shoulder in the darkness of the nave, neither making any advance nor inviting confidence. When the signal passed at length, it was from the stranger who put a hand upon the Count's arm and whispered in his ear.

"Giovanni Galla, my Lord——"

Giovanni Galla ! My lady's servant ! Here in the Church of St. Anastasia ! The Count divined the truth in a moment. The devoted fellow had scented out the danger and come to hear more of it. Nor could Gaston have desired an ally more faithful. Yes, it was a lucky encounter—the luckiest he had ever known.

"My Lady—is she well, Giovanni?" he asked, in spite of the warning. Giovanni held up his hand, but his lips did not move. Those in the chapel, in a lull of voices, had caught the whisper and remarked it. They were listening in shrewd amazement; while one of them, posted at the chapel gate, came out a little way and peered into the nave; but the crazy lantern did not betray the intruders, and the man returned to say that it was the wind which alarmed them. So the speaker droned on again, and the shadow of fear quitted the upturned faces.

"Let us go where there are not so many ears," whispered Giovanni in a low voice; "we can pass out by the sacristy, my Lord—I have the key."

They made as though to do so; but the unlighted lantern in the servant's hand catching the open gate of the screen as he turned, slipped from his grasp and fell with a clatter to the floor. There, in the silence of the church, the echo of its fall was weird and unnatural, and the succeeding hush profound and unbroken. Of the thirty in the chapel, every man now sprang to his feet; the speaker paused with hand uplifted; white faces looked towards him as though expecting some signal; the deep breathing of men was to be heard. Then, as at the breaking of a dam, the river of passion burst out. Men, poniard in hand, climbed the screen and swarmed into the nave. There was no longer any secrecy—voices were raised, oaths were heard, the whole church seemed full of terrible sounds. And in the

THE MEETING IN THE CHURCH 337

midst of this came the unity of idea. The spy had run toward the chapel of the Sacrament, they cried. He had dropped his lantern as he ran—it fell with a crash and went rolling over and over on the smooth marble pavement of the aisle; and it said plainly "This is the way." There were twenty in the chapel almost before the echo of the fall had died away.

Now, both Giovanni and the Count had realised from the first instant the cost of their maladroitness; and, looking one at the other in blank amazement, they stood for a single moment of time without any idea but that of the cost of it. That they could escape through this press of men was a madman's hope, and yet the wits of both remained to them; and while Giovanni stooped to pick up the broken lantern, the Count drew his sword and struck at the figure which first passed out of the iron gate and almost fell upon him as he crouched there. The man went down, stark dead, without a gasp or a cry, and the point of the sword breaking upon the flags, the Count released his hold of it and permitted himself to be dragged by Giovanni across the nave to the darkness of the further aisle of the dim chapels. Here Giovanni called upon his Italian cunning, and, lifting the lantern by the ring, he swung it to and fro three or four times and then threw it with all his force far down toward the western door of the church. It fell with a clang and a rattle, and the pursuers followed the clue like men sure of their prey. Giovanni was the leader now.

"This way, Excellency; the presbytery door is here. Twenty steps beyond it and we are safe."

"Twenty too many for me, friend Giovanni; I am done for. Do not stop for a lame man."

"They have hurt you, my Lord——"

"Ten days ago, before Pesaro's house—yes, go on, I will try. Is it this way, Giovanni?"

In plain truth his strength was almost spent, and he would have fallen in the aisle but for Giovanni's stout arm. The din in the church had now died down and there was nothing to be heard but the pattering footsteps of men and the whispering voices of those who questioned or were answered. Therein lay a new danger, which Giovanni perceived; and almost lifting the Count in his arms, he dragged him to the door of the sacristy. For one brief instant he believed that the end was to be won without a blow; and though odd figures loomed up in the darkness, and voices almost whispered in his ear, he pressed on headlong toward the sanctuary. Ten steps and he had gained it; but one of the Veronese, who had climbed to the gallery above the high altar, detected him as he passed; and calling down to the others that the spy was here, he drew the nearest to the place, and they fell all together upon the fugitives.

This sudden, swift attack, finding the Count without a sword and Giovanni armed but with a poniard, should have terminated on the instant those whom this odd chance discovered. The Count, indeed, had never believed from the first

moment of the outcry that he would see the streets of Verona again ; and now, with a mob of assassins crowding upon him, his sword broken and his head dizzy, he was almost prepared to welcome the decision. Nothing but a miracle could save them, and he, Gaston de Joyeuse, did not believe in miracles. His astonishment was the greater when those about him fell back at a word from this magician Giovanni, and stood altogether, amazed and wondering. For Giovanni, realising that he had but one card to play, played it without hesitation ; and in a loud, ringing voice he appealed to them—

“Signores, do you not know me, Giovanni Galla, the servant of Beatrice of Venice ?”

The men stopped with swords uplifted and broken threats ; and one called out that they should bring a lantern, while others came a little closer to peer into Giovanni's face. He had thrown back his cloak when truce came, and so standing that the light fell upon his face from a painted window above him, there were those who recognised him and said, “Yes, it is Giovanni Galla.” When the lantern was brought and held up by the man who had first addressed the thirty, these surmises became conviction, and confused voices asked what he did in the church.

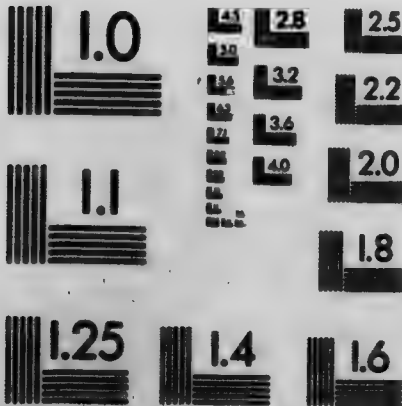
“I am here as the friend of my mistress and of Verona,” he said quietly. “If you will hear me, I will make that good. It is for your safety's sake as much as my own, Signores.”

It was a clever appeal to their curiosity, and



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while a few protested that the man was a spy, the more sage among them said, "No, no ; he is the servant of Beatrice ; let us hear him, and then we can act." None observed that as he spoke he was stepping back foot by foot towards the door of the sacristy upon his left hand, and that the Count was already upon the threshold. Their curiosity was all for his story ; and so he began to speak to them in quick words and gestures which warned them back from him. Why, he asked, were those things done in the name of Beatrice, and none of her friends made aware of them ? Was her faith in Verona less than their own ? Did they trust her so little that her servants were named for spies and enemies ? Or were they in ignorance that the soldiers of Balland surrounded the church, and that one loud summons would bring them to the place ? Their astonishment at this, the heated controversy between them, their rapid questions and spoken doubts were worth ten paces to Giovanni Galla.

"Yes, Signores," he went on, "there are dragoons upon the Piazza, and you waste your time in hunting for your friends. Go, for God's sake, while there is time. For myself"—here he halted and faced them again—"I intend to set you a good example. In yonder gallery"—he lifted his hand, and the throng turned as one man to follow the gesture—"in yonder gallery there are twenty ropes Signores. Remember the omen and profit by it. And permit me to wish you a long good night."

He was at the gate of the sacristy now ; the Count

THE MEETING IN THE CHURCH 341

had passed it. With a gesture as quick as light Giovanni sprang through the door and closed it heavily behind him.

"My Lord," he said quietly, "we will leave them to their prayers."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE COUNTERPLOT

GIOVANNI lighted tapers in his own apartment in the Bernese Palace, which lies but a stone's throw from the Church of St. Anastasia ; and when he had set wine and glasses upon the table, he addressed the Count for the first time since they had entered that great house of mystery and of sleep.

"My Lord," he said, "which of us at a hundred guesses would have named yonder church as our rendezvous to-night ? Not I, certainly ; nor you, if I judge aright the reasons which carried you there. And yet the finger of our destinies has brought us together—I doubt not, my Lord, for a good end."

The Count assented and added a few simple words which expressed a soldier's obligation in such terms as a soldier might fitly employ. The flight from the church had utterly exhausted him ; he lay back upon a velvet couch drawn near to the window of the room ; and there he watched a glimmer of the day battling with the rearguard of night and spreading its wan arc over the awakening East. A strange day, indeed, which brought him thus to my lady's

house at such an hour. And what welcome would she offer him? So much above all else he had yet to learn.

"How long have you been in Venice, Giovanni—when did you come?" he asked, seeking a way to that question which so troubled him. Giovanni understood him and replied without evasion.

"We followed you in twenty hours, Count. My mistress thought that you would be at the gate to receive her. You will forgive her disappointment."

"I have nothing to forgive, Giovanni. You know why I could not come. There was an affair with the people in the city, and I paid the price that fools always pay for confidence—yes, I have been ten days asking for my friends, and I am still without them. You can see yourself what I have gone through."

"In the house of Pesaro's daughter, Excellency; they said as much, but we did not believe them."

"Nevertheless, it is true; I fell at her gate and her servants saved me. Balland, the Governor, was glad to be quit of me; I had no other friend in Verona. Yes, I stayed, and the pretty Bianca nursed me. What then? We have killed the magicians, and the carpets do not fly. But, of course, I had no idea that you were here," he added, in some way apologetically.

"Nor we that you were hurt," said Giovanni sincerely; "nothing was said of that by Colonel Balland or your friends, my Lord." And then he added, a little shyly, "Perhaps they desired to spare my mistress."

The soft Italian laugh confessed to his own cynicism. Giovanni knew quite well why Beatrice had been kept in ignorance ; and deep down in this man's heart, perhaps, there lay a bitter resentment against a destiny which compelled him to serve Gaston de Joyeuse. For he, the servant, had loved no less than this man, the master, nor was he less ready to sacrifice life or fortune at the altar of his devotion. And while these thoughts were passing in his mind, the Count, in his turn, asked himself what account he should give to Beatrice of his days in Pesaro's house—would she understand ? Wholly a woman, would she believe ?

"I must see my lady at daybreak, Giovanni," he exclaimed earnestly. "You will understand my reasons. Frankly, I wish she had not come to Verona. There is no safe asylum for any woman here—for Beatrice of Venice, least of all. I left her believing she would go to Rome ; I wish to God I had never left her at all !"

His earnestness won a warmer word from the youth who weighed every admission in the balance of his own fidelity, and would understand none that could not be measured by it.

"True, my Lord," he said ; "and yet you should not be the one to complain of my mistress. Forgive me if I speak freely ; and since she is here, let it be our object to make the best of it. You say that you will see her at daybreak—do not count upon that ; you were wiser to say that you will let opportunity wait upon circumstance. I have no other interests than those of duty ; but if I were in

your place, I would not go to Madame de St. Remy from the house of Bianca Pesaro."

Gaston did not pretend to misunderstand him.

"Yes," he said, "there is that, of course, Giovanni. I do not doubt that some will make the most of it, and for that reason I must offer my own story. If I judge anything from your words, you mean to say that my lady will not see me?"

"Exactly, my Lord ; I fear she will not see you."

"One reason the more that I should see her. Let us keep nothing back of what we are thinking. You were in the church with me to-night, and you know. Has she less need of her friends to-morrow, Giovanni, than the next day or the day after?"

"My Lord, she never had a greater need of them."

He seemed to be weighing it up, as though doubtful if this were the appropriate hour for confidence. So much must be said, and, as Giovanni believed, so much must be done before the sun set again that the very minutes were precious ; and yet the solemn hour of daybreak hushed the voices and put a restraint upon the acts of both. From the windows of that lofty room, the gardens of the Palace could be seen and the river beyond them—the rounded green hills and the white tents of the soldiers, all shaping out of the mists as though day herself created them from shadows. The gardens themselves, in a darker tone, were but a cold and artless outline of black alleys and ghostly fountains ; and the clear shape of fauns and sprites watched them waking from their sleep. This subtle influence of change, the glimmering sheen of chilling

light, and the strange circumstances of their meeting, checked Giovanni's tongue and emphasised his indecision. He moved to and fro restlessly, and, opening one of the windows at last, he looked out over the city and drew in a deep breath of the life-giving breezes.

"Yes," he said, taking up the theme where he had left it, "she never had a greater need of them, my Lord. You and I were in the church to-night and we know. There will be strange things done in Verona before the sun sets."

The Count acquiesced, though he had no idea what troubled Giovanni.

"There have been strange things done every day, Giovanni," he rejoined. "What, for instance, is more wonderful than my presence in this house?"

"The good fortune of it, Count—that is more wonderful."

"The good fortune which denies me my lady's door."

"Yes, that your friendship for her may open it. That is what I wish to speak of. Your friendship for her; it may be your sacrifice."

Gaston opened his eyes and looked at the youth a little impatiently.

"Be quite plain with me," he said; "what has happened that I do not know?"

Again was Giovanni perplexed and hard put to it for an answer.

"Count," he stammered vaguely, "I have no right to say these things, but I cannot hold them from you. My mistress receives your countrymen

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in this house to-night. If any eloquence of yours can keep them away from it, for God's sake lose no time. Yes, it is that. They are wiser away. I cannot tell you more. You are clever, and will speak where I fail. Help us, my Lord, to save our honour—for, indeed, it has come to that !”

“You mean, Giovanni, that if my countrymen come here to-night, some harm will befall them ?”

“I mean, my Lord, it will be the last night they have to live.”

“Good God ! Is it a house of assassins then ?”

“The Veronese will rise and kill, Count, if your friends are so foolish.”

“But my lady, come—this is all nonsense, Giovanni ; you do not know what you are saying.”

“I wish, my Lord, that my life had ended ere the need for saying it arose.”

He sighed and turned from the window ; but, taking up the thread again as his own thoughts emboldened him, he continued with the heat and eloquence of a fanatic who has but one gospel to preach, and that concerning a woman's safety.

“My lady knows nothing,” he said ; “she is a cat-spaw. For three days now I have not slept my bed. The hours are precious, my Lord ; they are fleeting, and few are left to us. Such as there are, we must make the best of them. Listen, and bear with me. The patience of these people has been taxed beyond endurance. Your countrymen have robbed, maimed, and outraged them in the name of liberty and in the guise of friendship. The day has come when they will suffer no more.

Yes, this is no cowardice ; I know it ; I have been among them, lived with them, taken their oath and broken it. I say that the day has come. The Vesper bell to-day will be the tocsin for ten thousand. Night will find no countryman of yours alive. So it is to be by the people's law. And they begin here, my Lord, where honour should protect. Do you wonder that my lady has need of her friends ?”

He waited for an answer as a man who had found an audience entranced—and, indeed, the Count heard him with that wonder which forbids speech while it fires the blood and quickens every faculty. A simple thinker, Gaston followed this excited declaration line by line to its lamentable conclusion. The scene in the church, Bianca's hint at a possible disclosure, Balland's brutal policy, Napoleon's fears, and upon this Giovanni's declaration, wrote a story which he did not dare to put aside or attribute to the imaginations of fear. And the pith of it was this : he, Gaston, must save the woman who loved him as she had saved him in Venice but a few short weeks ago.

“Giovanni,” he exclaimed, like a man waking from a trance, “you say that my lady knows nothing of this——”

“My Lord, does that question do honour to your faith ?”

“Forgive me—I will put it another way. How many can you trust in this house—among the servants, I mean ?”

“There is one, Count——”

"Ha! yourself. Then the others will open the gates when the citizens knock."

"Frankly, I do not know, Count. The danger is everywhere. It may be about us while we talk. I can only say to you, it is here; save us 'rom it."

"If I am alive, I will do so, Giovanni. At what hour does your mistress receive my countrymen?"

"At eight o'clock."

"Have you any knowledge of what is intended?"

"Nothing but this—that no Frenchman who comes in will go out again."

"Then I must be counted among them, Giovanni. Yes, as you say, there is not a minute to lose. I must be on my way. Give me another cup of wine, friend; my strength comes back, you see, because I have work to do."

Giovanni poured out the wine and Gaston drank it at a gulp. He had caught up his cloak as he rose, and he drew it about his head and shoulders when he set the cup down.

"If I could see my lady, were it but for an instant, Giovanni——" he suggested.

Giovanni shook his head, but there was a softer glance in his eloquent eyes.

"My Lord," he said, "if you see her, you will not save her—and yet——"

He stammered and turned away to the window. Something in his attitude there catching Gaston's attention, he, also, crossed the room, and they looked out upon the river and the gardens together. The sun had risen above the eastern hills by this time, and its effulgent beams were darting in golden

radiance from cup to cup of the sparkling wavelets, making a mirror of the dancing waters and a thousand shields of fire where Verona's windows cast back the challenge to them. But the heart of the picture lay among the roses of the garden where my lady Beatrice, awake at the summons of dawn, walked alone with pensive air and stately grace. She, too, had dreamed an ill dream this night, and its shadow was upon her sweet face as she walked, and the sunshine could not lift it nor the day banish the omen.

For my lady knew that she stood alone in Verona, and she said that her lover remained the willing prisoner of Bianca's house.

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CHAPTER XXVII

THE GUARD IS TURNED OUT

VERONA was awake as Gaston strode through her busy streets upon his way to the Castle of St. Felix. Already the sun made itself felt on the open piazza, and the peasants coming in with their ox-wagons to church and market, wiped their faces as they walked and declared that spring was before time and summer at her heels. By here and there, open church doors revealed a dark vision of kneeling women and ghostly tapers and translucent beams shining down upon silver vestments through windows of the fables; but the narrow alleys and side streets were crowded by busy people who cared little whether it were French or Italian who bought their wares, and were never politicians when they could be merchants. Gaston, indeed, moved among these people with an air of wonder he could not conceal. Acquainted as he was with their desires and aims, he found it impossible to believe the whole of Giovanni Galla's story, or to convince himself that the very churches which now harboured worshippers would shelter assassins at the

vesper office. And yet his own experience might have taught him, for had he not seen the ploughshare cheek by jowl with the battlefield many a time in Italy; and what beast of burden rested because a nation fell or a kingdom was lost on the hills about its pasturage? Here in Verona, peace might have reigned with all her dower of laughter and content. Down by the river merry girls splashed and jested about the washing-tub; oxen plodded laboriously in the wider thoroughfares; wagons went rolling in and out of the unkept gutters—children babbled, bells rang, horses neighed, the hive of the city's life swarmed and clustered about the blossom of the day. Who that regarded it might pause to say, "All this is but the cloak; the churches echo oaths, not prayers; the laughter is the laughter of anger, not of joy; the houses do not harbour merchants but assassins; the bells ring the tocsin, not the angelus." And yet this was the truth; and the day which opened to the unclouded sun must close in the darkness of death and the agony of the dying. For such was Verona's destiny; not to be changed because a woman loved and a man had sworn to defend her.

Count Gaston hurried on to the Castle, preoccupied by his own perplexities and little interested by what he saw about him when once his incredulity had been satisfied. He was somewhat astonished at meeting but few Frenchmen in the streets; but this he attributed to some concentration on Balland's part; and when at length the gate of the Castle came to his view, and the sentry there

challenged him, his first inquiry was for the Governor, his second for Sergeant Jaincy. The trooper answered him that Colonel Balland was then on the road to Padua with a division of cavalry and three battalions of infantry ; but as to Sergeant Jaincy, he was in the guardroom and should immediately be summoned. When the old soldier appeared, his first exclamation of pleasure gave way at once to an expression of alarm which he was at no pains to conceal or apologise for.

"They sent word that you had ridden from here five days ago, Count. I went down to Pesaro's house and had the news from them myself. Pity it isn't true if all I hear is one-half of what's to come. The Governor's at Padua ; I wish you were with him, if I may speak freely,"

"I expect you to do that, Jaincy," said Gaston, as he led the way to his own quarters. "God knows we spoke freely enough to each other the day we parted. We must wipe that out Sergeant, some day and somewhere—but I have other things for to-day. What carries the Colonel to Padua when, by all accounts, he is so badly wanted here ? Yes, that's it, Jaincy, what does he do at Padua, and why does he leave me helpless down yonder ? You may understand that I am curious."

They used to say in his regiment that old Jaincy was all shoulders and hips and round full oaths, and now, when the Count questioned him, he squared himself up and saluted gravely, and followed this concession to seniority with an outburst which shook the window of the room.

"Fire burn their souls that did it, Captain. Ay, when a woman catches a man by the ears who is the wizard to pinch her little fingers? I was at Pesaro's house every day, and what did the wench say—'He orders you to return; he does well; he presents his compliments to the Governor and will bide where he is.' And, says I, there will be soft fingers in that house and soft beds, and devil take me if I would not be hurt myself for the price of them. So I marched to orders, and the Colonel, he says 'No, no, that's his own affair; mine's with the guns, and not so dangerous'; and betwixt us, Count we said you were doing very well—and oh my old master," he added in an affectionate outburst, "as God is my witness, you were safer in Pesaro's house than at the Governor's table, I do believe."

Old Jaincy knew perfectly well that he could be hanged for this avowal; but his affection for the Count, his master, had been not the least precious thing in his life, and he believed that he must speak to-day, or for ever hold his tongue. As for Gaston it was no surprise for him to hear of Balland's amiable disposition towards him; and he treated the recital of it with levity.

"See how we Frenchmen love one another, Jaincy," he said—and then: "Oh, I believe ever word of it; the old rogue would hang his own mother if he could keep office a year thereby. That's nothing to you or me, Jaincy; we must find out what takes him to India, why he leaves his post when there is no other to stand for him. Is

fear or treachery or both ? I must know that before the sun sets, old friend."

Sergeant Jaincy had no doubt whatever why the Colonel had ridden to Padua ; but he loved an enigma, and he put the facts to Gaston in his own odd way.

"When the fox goes to ground the chickens return," he said quietly ; "there are plenty of chickens down yonder, and they will have eaten our corn before the week is out. I tell you truly, Count, though I have served this man, that what is done to-day is the worst thing a Frenchman has done in Italy. Here we have but half a battalion and six guns when an army corps would not be over much. God bear with me when I say that I do believe it to be treachery. Yes, the Colonel will come back to count the dead, they won't be Veronese, be sure of it ! I am an old man, but I would lay down my life willingly if this deed of shame could not be done."

The old man's face flushed as he spoke, and the hand which rested upon the table before him trembled visibly. To the Count, his blunt expression of the truth was like the key to a hundred perplexities with which his brain had been dizzy since he entered the Castle. That a Frenchman could plan and abet such an outrage as the massacre of his own countrymen for the sake of political advantage, seemed to him to be beyond any story of the darkest ages of man. And yet how could he deny it ? Every fact justified the honest anger of this simple old soldier. For months now Bona-

parte had been seeking some pretext for the final subjugation of Verona; he had tried all means—outrage, insult, pillage, calumny—but in vain. These patient people suffered, but did not rebel. Now, however, the hour seemed to have come. Press the quarry hard enough and it will turn at last, so had Balland argued.

"They want war, old Jaincy," the Count said, his voice echoing that sadness which the terrible truth provoked; "they want war, and they mean to have it. Yes, a child could understand it. They withdraw the troops, affront these people, and when the murder is done, they will come back to be the judges. If General Bonaparte knew of this—

Jaincy interrupted him with a startled cry.

"Do not let us speak of the General—our faith must hold him guiltless until it is proved otherwise, Count. Yes, we owe that to him whatever we may think."

He looked his master full in the face, and the eyes of both assented to that equivocation. In their hearts, they believed that Bonaparte was guilty; but they clung to their faith in him, desperately, as men who worshipped his genius.

"You are right to remind me of that, Jaincy," continued Gaston after a pause. "We have our duty to do, and God knows it is difficult enough. Let us begin upon it at once. I am going to turn out the guard—but first a word upon another matter. Do you know that the Marquise de St. Remy received to-night?"

"Every one knows it, Count. It is by the

Governor's order, and they say General Bonaparte's also. She is going to make a Faubourg St. Germain of the Bernese Palace. But I doubt the wisdom of it; and if any friend of mine were going, I would lock the door and pocket the key."

"Do you think there is any danger, then, Jaincy?"

"That is as may be, Count. There are some who like to dance upon hot bricks—I do not."

"I see that you do think there is danger, Jaincy. Let us suppose that these people do go to her house, three or four hundred of them—what then? They are civilians, unarmed; and if—if Jaincy, there were any treachery—well, I ask you, what then?"

"Then, God help them, Count, for we cannot."

"You mean that we have not troops enough?"

"I mean that we can hold the Castle, but that the streets must take care of themselves. We have been in the streets together before now, and we know a little about it. Ay, we have had enough nursing for some time to come."

Jaincy loved his little jest; and the wrinkled old face was puckered up, and the blue-grey eyes twinkled when the thrust went home. But he had no intention to wound, and so he continued quickly.

"Enough of nursing and fair words, to be sure. I see that you are asking for my advice, Count, and I shall presume to offer it. Let every bridge be drawn to-night at sunset. Keep the powder dry and the torches ready. If our flag is flying when the General comes in, that will be something. As for the poor souls down yonder, I say God help them."

"Wisdom, Jaincy, but a little selfish, is it not? I am much obliged for your good advice, but now hear mine. First of the Bernese Palace; I shall be there at eight o'clock, old Jaincy."

"You, Count! Good God, what folly!"

The Count went on without heeding him.

"I shall be there with, let us say, a hundred picked men. Just consider, Jaincy, the forts are impregnable—what does it matter if they are held by fifty men or five thousand? No mob can storm them. You talk of gunners—what are your gunners going to do? To knock down the houses wherein our countrymen are hiding—yes, that would be clever, and would help us very much. No, no, old friend; let me tell you something more. I was in the Church of St. Anastasia last night, and I know what must happen. They mean to murder every soul that enters the Bernese Palace to-night. It is to be done as the French come out. There will be five thousand down yonder in arms when Vespers are sung. You say that we are five hundred against them; poor odds, old Jaincy; but we will make the best of it. Think of that as we go the round. And help me to say that, as God is above me, I will either save the Palace to-night or burn it with it!"

Jaincy heard him with startled ears and eyes which expressed his amazement. His own timely counsels had been given, not of cowardice but of stubborn belief in the continuing patience of the Veronese. Whatever these Italians might do, he had not contemplated massacre and outrage;

soldier, he thought only of a soldier's duty and the place of it ; but a word from his master awoke every chivalrous feeling within him.

"I ask only this, Count," he rejoined, "that where you go I may follow—yes, I knew nothing of it, and God help us all if a half of it be true !"

"Amen to that, old Jaincy. Now come—the time presses and we have much to do. Let us begin while we may."

It was after midday when Gaston returned to his own room, where, having partaken of a light breakfast, he lay down upon a soldier's bed for such few hours of rest as the ominous day permitted him. If he found it strange to be there in the Castle of St. Felix, risen almost from the dead to resume his old authority, the personal incident was less in his mind than the good fortune, if such it were, which had restored his command at such a time. Given over-much to believe in the factor of luck, he reflected how different it might have been if the surgeon Felippi had delayed his treachery, or Pesaro had lingered in Venice. No doubt the ancient rascal who had sent him to the Church of St. Anastasia believed him to have perished there ; and Gaston could spare a moment to promise himself that this aged Felippi should certainly hang. For the rest, the excitement of the day dazed his brain, and sent a hundred thoughts chasing each other through it. He must save Beatrice this night—to that end he believed his own life to have been preserved. He would save her, and carry her from this city of

peril ; and the aftermath should be as she chose to make it. The vision of her as she walked in her garden amid her roses, a sweet pathetic figure in her loneliness, appealed to him irresistibly, and spurred his imagination to subtleties quite foreign to his normal intellect. He was strong in his desire to save her ; and it seemed as though this call from her house, this sure appeal to his manhood to stand with her were a better physician than any which Italy could find him. The days in Bianca's house stood now for obliterated lines in a story which must be for ever forgotten. When he slept, the image of Beatrice was at his side and some echo of her voice bade him rest. So all the world was lost to him, and for five full hours he did not stir upon his bed.

Old Jaincy waked him, stealing into the room upon tiptoe and touching him twice upon the shoulder before his master stirred.

"Five o'clock, Count, and Vespers ringing. They will serve dinner in half an hour's time, if your Excellency pleases."

Gaston sat up and regarded old Jaincy with pleased amazement. But for his voice, he would not have recognised the trim old soldier in this odd figure, becaped and plumed and larded like your true Italian of the casino and the *café*.

"You will come to be a *bravo* yet, old Jaincy," he said, with the laugh of the old days ; and with this he sprang from his bed and began to dress himself while Jaincy talked. The honest old fellow, given overmuch to the humour of affairs even when

they were most dangerous, could scarce forbear a chuckle while he told of all he had done.

"Deforet takes the command here and will hold the gate at any cost, Count. Your orders to Legros at the Government Palace and to Cauteret went by horse an hour ago. They will stand to arms at every post, and, for the rest, act upon their discretion as circumstances arise. Our own fellows are now in the barrack-yard, and Heaven be good to me if ever I valued the General's coat as I value it to-night. Yes, Count, if you can find their like in Verona or out of it, I'll forego my rank. Be pleased to dress and say if you approve. We've done our best—though the cooks go naked."

Old Jaincy was speaking of the hundred picked men, chosen to accompany them to Beatrice's house; and when Gaston was dressed he followed the sergeant to the barrack-yard and there beheld a spectacle as good as any Verona had showed him. These veterans, soldiers of France, grown old in arms, were soldiers apparently no more. Some in the white robes of cooks, some disguised as lacqueys, some as linkmen, by here and there a boatman from the river, a sacristan, pedlars from Venice, gardeners with their baskets—there was never a more fantastic company in the Castle of St. Felix, nor would be while one stone stood upon another. And yet, with all the laughter and the horseplay, the jest between man and man and the pride in the mere grotesque, these fellows understood what errand carried them to the Bernese Palace, and what were their chances of accomplishing it. Gaston had but

to speak to the first he chose at a hazard to be assured of that. He was a burly cook in a white smock and turban and he carried a shining saucepan in his hand.

"And how do they call you, my fine fellow?" Gaston asked. He saluted and answered with splendid dignity—

"Jean Boreau, my Lord."

"Your trade is a good one?"

"I cook for my comrades, Lord."

"And your dishes——"

"Are the hearts of men."

He laughed and pulled aside his smock, disclosing a vest of mail and the pistols at his girdle. It was the same everywhere—steel beneath the jester's corslet and poniard to his hand. When all had passed in review, the Count addressed them in quiet, simple words that touched their hearts as they believed that Bonaparte alone could touch them.

"My lads," he said, "I will not ask you if you are ready to follow me. Our countrymen down yonder will be asking by and by what help the Castle means to give them. I count upon you to answer that question as you have always answered it for France. Sergeant Jaincy will tell you what you have to do when you arrive at the Palace, and you will do it as men and servants of General Bonaparte. I am sending you now to the messroom for supper, for an empty man fills no ranks. Go, and act wisely—you know how much depends upon your fidelity for you are the chosen, and the honour of France is in your keeping to-night."

They would have cheered at the warning hand of Sergeant Jaincy had he forbidden them; but he dismissed them in silence; and when the Count had singled out one here and there to speak a particular word to him, he left them to their supper, and went alone to a high place of the ramparts whence he could look down upon Verona and her darkened streets. Twilight had now crept over the hills, and the long line of advancing shadow was like some stealthy enemy debouching from the vineyards with the vanguards of night; in the city herself the stars of light were kindled one by one, and they traced a plan, as a pencil of fire in a mathematician's hand. Gaston, possessed of the clearest vision, was in no way surprised that the more central streets should be deserted; while from lane and alley men poured forth in little groups toward the church and the convents. So much his ears had taught him to expect yesternight; and as he watched these men, some pursuing a solitary way, others waiting for friends and comrades, the truth of all his foreboding justified itself, and he knew that dark deeds would be done in Verona to-night.

A silent city and the Vesper bell chiming musically—green hills about it and the beacon fires of watching armies; a lazy river catching the crimson sunset on a bosom of gold; roofs, spires, the rounded domes, the dormer windows, the lofty summits of steeple and campanile—a jumble of red tiles and mossy walls and crazy eaves and gargoyles grotesque—of such was the panorama unfolded before the

Count's sad eyes. But the heart of it was my Lady's Palace, ablaze already with lights, though dark as night in the maze of the gardens; and Gaston, gazing upon it with tender regard, depicted a gentle woman there and her guests about her in the light of her gracious courtesy—and from that the vision of the terror came to him, and he peopled her gardens with the cloaked figures and in the cellars he detected the assassin and the *bravo*. Yes, truly, she, surrounded by so many who did her homage, had but one friend in Verona to-night, and he might be as impotent as the others. For this was Gaston's doubt—whether he could save her from that cataclysm or would be swept away by it to perish with those whom French treachery had offered as a holocaust to the glory of Bonaparte.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MASTER PROPHET

IT had been decided between Gaston and the sergeant that they should not leave the Castle until dark had come down upon Verona; and it was nine o'clock by the churches when the hundred assembled at the river quay, and embarked in the four cutters with which Bonaparte's foresight had equipped the fortress. Briefly put, after prolonged debate, their plan was this: that they should enter the Bernese Palace from the river, and so soon as they held the gardens, should close the great gates and entrench themselves where circumstances dictated. Obstinate in their belief that the first assault would be upon the Palace, they could not name the hour of it, and they must perforce go out in the darkness, or disclose their stratagem to every passer-by. So the Count determined upon patience; and calling an iron nerve to his aid, he numbered the fateful minutes, and wondered if the appointed hour would ever come. Any accident, a chance cry, a blow in anger, or the alarm of a bell might precipitate this calamity, and laugh at the schemes he

had laid with so much weary deliberation. He could but entrust his case to the arbitration of fortune, and leave the rest to God.

There was a mist upon the river when the boats put out, and here and there an ominous silence in those streets which bordered the right bank or debouched from the city to the water. If omen went for anything, the men might have been forgiven a moment's misgivings, when, almost at the Castle gate, a musket shot saluted the first of the cutters as she drifted away in a bank of fog, and a woman's shrill scream broke in upon the silence. The Count, indeed, started at the wild cry as though some one had touched him upon the shoulder ; and listening intently for a sequel, the subsequent stillness but aggravated the mystery. A shot had been fired and a woman murdered—but whether it were a Frenchwoman or an Italian, he did not dare to say ; and many a cry like that would go up to the starry heavens before dawn broke, he said, and many another pay the dread price which Bonaparte had asked of this city and its people.

Now the river plan had been largely old Jaincy's and no sooner were his men upon the quay than he began to be here and there in the shadows usurping the command naturally and declaring his purpose in sonorous whispers which themselves suggested a mystery.

"Go upon your oars as feathers on the water," he said to them. "Let there be no talking between you ; and when you make the Palace, show as little of yourselves as the night will let you. You

Bernot, will lead the way. Avoid company if you can ; but if you cannot, speak as you know how to. The first musket brings us all together, mind ; but what happens ashore is no concern of ours. Go on, my lads, and carry good hearts with you."

He pushed the boat from the bank and turned to the Count to reiterate his opinion that the river was the safer way.

"If they know that we know, then the gates are shut surely," he would have it. "That's fair argument, and it is in my mind that those who do not knock are the soonest into a woman's house. We owe something to the Governor ; and that is as true as the gospel, Count. They will never look for troops from the forts with men marching out for the last three days. And there's shelter in the gardens. If they come in by water, it will be afterwards. We shall have our hands free then, and God help them ! Do you take the lines in the last boat, Count—that's the place for the wits to-night."

Gaston smiled at the compliment, but obeyed the sergeant ; and taking the tiller lines in the last of the longboats, he commanded them to give way, and they drifted off into the mists with gentle strokes of the muted oars, an intrepid crew, as zealous as he could wish them to be. On either hand now, the lofty buildings of this city of the ages loomed up like walls of rock through the drifting banks of fog. Churches, palaces, the bastions of forts took the oddest shapes, revealing themselves with dramatic suddenness, or as quickly disappearing when the mists enveloped them. Ever and anon, the lights

of a river *café* cast an aureole of hazy golden radiance upon the drifting wreaths of vapour ; or a street would declare itself, with its pendant lamps and narrow arches and eave stooping to eave as man to wife in confidence. For the most part, these streets were deserted ; but it chanced that as the boats began to follow that great bend of the Adige wherein the heart of Verona is encradled, voices from an alley, narrower than the others, broke upon the ear and drew a simultaneous halt from every oarsman. As the boats drifted by the mouth of this tortuous lane, the crews perceived, by the light of rocking torches, a scene which quickened every pulse and loosened tongues that were better still. For in the mouth of the lane was enacted the first of those bloody massacres which disgraced Verona to all time, and has left to posterity the shame of her terrible "Vespers." Swarming out to the cry "Verona ; liberty !—down with the French !" a mob rushed pell-mell toward the *café* of Maitre Jardine, one of the oldest French residents in the city. The wretched man himself, his wife and daughters at his side, could plainly be perceived at an upper window, imploring them for God's sake to take pity upon him. The answer was a hail of musket shot accompanied by frenzied blows upon the shuttered door, and upon this the splintering of glass, the hoarse death-cry of men and the shrill screams of terrified women. As hounds that cease their barking when they close in upon their quarry so, from this time, did the aggressors forget their watchword, "Verona !" while they hurled them

selves into the doomed *café*, and thrust their torches to its woodwork. In silence they watched the creeping flames, in silence they dragged the bodies out; and then, as upon a new wave of impulse, recollecting with laggard prudence that one house might burn twenty, and that this was not the appointed hour, they began to beat out the flames with their pikes, some running to the river for water, some throwing the burning furniture into the streets, others, again, standing in the crazy indolence which says, "Well, and what now?"

The soldiers in the longboats watched this scene with an impotent rage which their officers could scarcely control. Veterans all, the cry from French throats stirred their hearts with emotions they would not disguise; the spectacle of their countrymen thus treated moved them to frenzies of unspoken anger. Many hands, indeed, closed upon pistol and poniard in the brief moments of the tragedy; but the Count's stern command, Bernot's entreaties and the fierce oaths from old Jaincy's tongue, kept them in their places and ultimately sent them on again. There was logic in it, too, for none doubted that Jardine and his family had perished, and it were ill enough to risk all for the sake of a dead man's goods. So, complainingly, and with dark looks, they bent to their oars again, and one by one passed into the mists, and drew nearer to the Palace. Impossible now to say that the omens had deceived them. Yonder city, with its myriad of lights, its dark alleys, its forbidding ramparts, must witness to-night that tornado of tragedy of which this hush was the

fitting prelude. So Gaston reasoned as he urged the men on in the darkness. He knew that he must play a great part for France to-night ; but the issues were with the Higher Power.

And so to the Palace itself, wherein last night he had won his life at such a hazard. As wayfarers who pass suddenly from the dark alleys of a city's environs to the dazzling brightness of her streets, so did these boats come together from the mists into the splendid radiance which a hundred windows cast upon the gardens and the river beyond them. And here Jaincy was the master prophet. None watched by the river gate ; none walked in the silent groves. The gardens were deserted when the chosen hundred took possession of them, one by one, as conspirators coming out of the night upon a work of mercy.

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CHAPTER XXIX

DOOM

THE Lady Beatrice received her guests in the *salon* known as "The Hall of Pictures," and here, from the hour of eight o'clock onward, the lacqueys guided the serried ranks of those who believed that in the Bernese Palace a great work for France and for Verona was being done.

It was a splendid scene, befittingly framed by that magnificent gallery. Upon lofty walls were the chosen masterpieces of Francesco Caroto, Giotto and Cavazzola, well hung in the light of a thousand white wax candles. Crimson, beneath chandeliers of the purest crystal, an immense carpet brought from the East for this very festival, added its warm glow of colour to the dazzling gowns of the women, the glittering uniforms of the officers, and the flashing robes of layman and priest. No figure of social importance in Verona had neglected to come to the Bernese Palace to-night. Bishops in purple and Princes of the Church in flowing scarlet, young officers from the garrison swinging golden tassels

from their shoulders (but these in a conspicuous minority), the fairest women of France in the clinging seductive drapery which Paris had sent them, portly French citizens a-tiptoe for their suits of silks or creamy velvet, bucks and beaux, old and young, a shimmering throng belaced, bejewelled and wholly magnificent, struggled to pay homage to Bonaparte's chosen. And never had her dignity helped her more lavishly, or a gown so well served a wearer as when my lady took her stand beneath the canopy of the daïs and there welcomed all with her gentle graciousness. Upon her head a crown of diamonds, a collar of emeralds and diamonds about her neck, ruby bracelets twined about her white arms, a girdle of pearls about her waist, and so depending like a rosary almost to her feet—men said, that if Verona needed a queen, Bonaparte had already sent her one. And yet, had they but known this woman's heart, had they but read that sweet face truly, what pity would have been wrung from them. For my lady knew—the secret of the night was hers. In her hand she crumpled the note which told her all.

The Duc de Verdennes, *aide-de-camp* to the chivalrous Moreau, had written the letter and despatched it by his personal servant at the moment of his own flight from Verona. "Madame," he had said, "a friend warns you, and will help you if he can. The city is in arms. Close the gates of your house and let none pass out. I go to Colonel Balland and will return, God helping me."

Beatrice read the letter twice, while the room and

all its moving figures reeled about her in a dizzy scene, which blinded her and seemed to paralyse her faculties. The music, wild and haunting, the dancing lights, the hum of flippant talk, she was conscious of them all; and yet in a single instant their significance was changed. Another, perhaps, would have laughed incredulously, showing the letter here and there and saying, "This is the jest of my friend, the Duke." But she had lived too long among Italians, had heard and known too much of that which was passing in the city to doubt the writer, or the truth of his warning. And had not Giovanni Galla besought her—five days ago had he not implored her to quit Verona, and to seek that asylum in Rome where alone she might find peace. Yes, Giovanni was the wise one—and she—but the voice of my lord the Bishop of Vicenza recalled her from that, and with one supreme effort she recovered herself, and remembered the French officer at her side, who spoke of the new era of peace and reconciliation.

A gracious word sent the soldier to the throng upon her left hand—for instinctively French and Veronese had grouped themselves upon opposite sides of the Hall of Pictures; and others came, painters from the studios, priests to talk of books, musicians with their chat of mass and opera, grave citizens stammering the commonplace. Beatrice received them all with the winning smile which numbered friends with the minutes, and while she received them her heart seemed to echo her despair by its beating; and above all other sounds was the

voice of the dreadful warning. Could these, her guests, she asked, be doomed by the mad intrigues of a driven people? Had all been in vain—her flight, the abnegation of her pride, her faith in a man who would sleep to-night in Pesaro's house? Must it all end in this cataclysm of horror; so terrible that the mind did not dare to contemplate it? Was there no way, no help, no wisdom that should save her from the determined end which an ironic destiny appeared to have shaped for her? She knew not.

"My Lord," she said to the Bishop at her side. "I have some bad news from my friend the Duke de Verdennes—ask them, please, to send my servant Giovanni to me."

The amiable Bishop, obsequious in his obedience, despatched a young officer upon the quest; and for a full quarter of an hour the influx of guests continued in one unbroken *queue* which threatened to fill even that great room to overflowing. But Giovanni did not come, nor did any appear in his place, and anon, it became apparent to Beatrice that the number of servants in the room was appreciably less, and that those who remained avoided her and went uneasily, as though conscious of impending evil. And to this, the young officer, returning hurried and breathless from his errand, added his tribute to the unconscious mystery.

"Your servant Giovanni is not in the house, Marquise," he said, and there was none to tell her that it was a lie, and that Giovanni Galla lay as cold and dead in the cellars of the Palace. She could but

stare in bewildered astonishment at such an answer, and she repeated after him—

“Not in the house, Captain Jerome—surely that is a mistake! Pray ask them to send him to me without delay.”

The soldier went away willingly enough, and the press upon the daïs becoming so great that later guests could not pass the sweltering throngs, Beatrice invited one of those near to her to lead her through the rooms that she might speak to all; and so she passed down among them, and everywhere they made a lane for her and sought her notice. Of her own feelings at such a moment she has been able to tell little. The immensity of the peril which hovered about the house and the city forced upon her an attention to trivial things which could but be a realisation of its imminence and inevitability. While she asked herself at one moment the name of a man so to be trusted that he might read her letter, she would forget the question instantly and observe the buttons upon a sleeve, the roses in a vase, or the diamonds about a woman's throat. Every word spoken to her was distinctly heard and remembered. With Leonard Courer, the procurator, she discussed the pictures of Paolo Veronese, and especially that picture in the Church of St. Giogio which Bonaparte had admired. “They say that it must go to Paris,” the procurator ventured. “I will bring it back myself,” she answered him laughingly. When the curé of St. Anastasia asked her of the Chevalier Ville-tard, she replied that he was with Bonaparte at

Padua—"pray that he may continue there," she added as she went by. But this sudden memory of Villetard was like ice upon her heart. To whom else but to him must the terror and doubt of this night be set down? When he prated of peace and the good understanding, what lay behind in that concealed chamber of the mind which, perhaps, he himself rarely unlocked? In truth, she believed his shadow to be upon her even here—the shadow of a man who hovered like a vulture in the path of devastating armies. And she could not help but reflect that but for him Gaston, her lover, would have fled Venice, and she herself, perhaps, have stood with him to-night beyond the reach of intrigue or calumny.

These changing moods followed her through the great rooms to the lower galleries, and thence to the smaller apartments which bordered upon the river and permitted a view of the southern hills and the open country lying between them. Few of the guests had as yet penetrated so far, and while many a corner offered a haven to bolder lovers, but the murmur of sounds and an echo of sweet music broke in upon the comparative stillness. Such a change from heat and light and laughter to cooling breezes and the solitude of deserted rooms nerve her to new hope, and she began to put it to herself that, after all, it was but one man's word, and that Duc de Verdennes might have fled the city on premature alarm. Of this she spoke to the Bishop who had followed her from the hall; and she sought indirectly to derive comfort from his steady belief in the good temper of his people.

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The message

[Page 57]

"Yes," she said, showing him the crumpled note, "our friend the Duke will lose no time in formalities, my Lord. He was to have been here to-night—but he prefers the camp at Padua. Well, he is not the only one who finds Verona unhealthy just now."

"You speak of its temper, Marquise," the ecclesiastic rejoined, with some little manner of his authority—"well I venture to think that the Church has a right to express an opinion upon that. If all is true that is said of our friends at Padua, the Duke would certainly be safer among us. But, of course, we cannot expect Frenchmen to admit that," he added apologetically.

"They will admit nothing but their own virtues, Bishop. We Italians have, at least, the merit of candour. We know our faults and cling to them with national pride in their distinction. But the French are a nation of egoists and we must sacrifice at the altar of their vanity or suffer. I do not wonder that the people lose patience—is there another race which would submit as we have submitted or bend their necks so willingly to the yoke? You, as one to whom the people look, must speak of these things sometimes. I can well understand your anxieties, though you hesitate to complain of them."

She looked up at him, putting the question through his vanity; but the good Bishop, a simple old man who worked in spirit by the Lake of Galilee and prayed for his enemies every day, answered her without reservation, and with some little pity for her doubt of those he championed—

"I have no doubt of my people. What they suffer is offered humbly to God in expiation. Our tribute is to Cæsar, but our homes remain dear to us, and we sacrifice ourselves because of them. I know your friend the Duke was afraid of the children of Verona, he is little less than a coward, Marquise. But it is, of course, only your way of speaking."

"It is more than that, my Lord,—it is my way of telling you that he implores me to shut the gates of my house and to let none pass out; that he says the city is in arms—yes, and as God is above us, that he fears for the safety of those who are my guests to-night. That is the subject of his letter. I leave you to imagine with what feelings I have read it."

She paused and leaned against a white marble mantelpiece, her face as colourless as the stone behind her, and her breast heavy with the emotion of that recital. Why she had told this man, when she had meant to tell none, she did not know. But the burden was too heavy to be borne alone—she almost feared that it would rob her of reason. Marquis Lord of Vicenza, meanwhile looked at her as one who listens to a jest. He could not find words to speak of fables such as this.

"My dear Lady," he said at last, "if the Duke has really written to you in this way, he is little less than a madman. Forgive my frankness. Whatever may happen in this city, it will not be at the Berne Palace, nor will it concern defenceless people. I myself will answer for that. I was fifteen years curé of St. Anastasia before I went to Vicenza. Credit me with some little knowledge of those

have worked among. Passionate they may be—they would not be true Italians were they not. But the Duke is judging us by his own. This is not Paris, and we have neither King nor Queen to murder. I would as soon think of insulting your guests face to face as of shutting the gates of your house upon them. No, indeed, it is a coward who speaks, and he will need the army at Padua to protect him."

So convinced was he that he laughed lightly at his own confidences; and for a spell the two stood there—my lady, pale and agitated, the churchman, bland and incredulous. Willing as she was to catch at any straw of faith, the lingering doubt remained; and all that spoke of her hospitality, the music, the lights, the voices seemed to remind her of that overwhelming responsibility to those about her, and of the utter hopelessness of her case.

"It may be as you say, my Lord," she exclaimed at length; "I will try to think so for your people's sake—and yet——"

"And yet," he broke in, "a foolish fellow having terrified you, you are womanly enough to say 'It may be so.'"

"I do say that. Imagine, my Lord, if but one word of all these were true."

She held the letter out to him, and he took it with contemptuous fingers.

"I would as soon believe that evil is better than good. If the good behaviour of my city is the question, then, Marquise, I answer for it by this."

He twisted the paper up and held it to the flame

of a candle. They were both watching it blacken and burn when, through the open window of the little *salon*, there came to them the sound of a man's voice, and upon that the sharp report of a musket fired at the river's bank. Common sounds as these were in the days when Verona was for all purposes a besieged city, Beatrice started at them to-night, and the blood rushing to her face, she put a hand upon the marble to steady herself.

"My Lord," she said, "forgive me if I am unconvinced."

The burning paper had dropped from the churchman's hand when he heard the report of the musket, and without answering he went to the window and gazed out for some time over the darkened river. The aureole of light cast by the palace windows showed him nothing; and he was about to shut the casement and to address himself to sleep when, as it seemed at some considerable distance from them, but plain and terrible in its weird remoteness, there broke upon the stillness of the gardens a low murmur of human voices rising and falling in a crescendo of baffled anger and impotent threat; and these sounds dying away for an instant another took their places—that of a thousand blows of iron upon iron, and then as suddenly the ringing of a hundred bells, the flaming of beacon fires upon the hills and from one end of Verona to the other, the unleashing of the human hounds and the beginning of tragedy so bloody that in all the story of Italy nothing more terrible has been written.

The churchman's hands trembled when he saw

the window, and without looking Beatrice in the face, he offered her his arm to lead her back to the guests.

"We must tell them, Marquise," he said abruptly ; "I do not know what is happening, but I am going out to see—your guests must be prepared. Yes, I will speak myself—and oh, my dear daughter," he added with gentle grace, "let us put our trust in God and all will surely be well."

She did not answer him. Her heart beat wildly, for there had come to her out of her fear and dismay a new purpose, obstinate and courageous and worthy of her name. If this, indeed, were the peril ; if the lives of those she sheltered were at stake, then would she give her answer fearlessly and without reserve. Such was her determination when she re-entered the Hall of Pictures, and bade him lead her to the daïs. She would be the General of her own forces, and cast down the glove to those who threatened her.

"My Lord," she said, "ask silence for me."

He raised a silvery voice and cried above the murmur—"My children, Madame la Marquise would speak with you." They pressed about the throne, desirous to hear her, man vieing with man for her favour.

"My dear friends and guests," she said, "the city is in arms—the Palace is threatened—I count upon you all this dreadful night. Gentlemen, give me your courage to save my name and my honour. And do you, my sisters, help us by your prayers. Let us bear ourselves as true children of France and

Italy. Colonel Duclos, will you take my burden upon you? Signor Correr, you will answer for your friends—there is no time for words. I appeal to you now, for God's sake, to act. Let the gates be closed—let the courtyard be held. Who will go—who will answer me?"

It is to be imagined how such an appeal fell upon the ears of men and women who had looked to hear some purpose of their pleasure; but now in one brief instant, suffered sentence of doom spoken by trembling lips, unanswered and unanswerable. For, in the silence that followed upon this confession of the worst, those who listened heard the clamour for themselves, the crashing blows, the frenzied voices of the mob. And while they stood paralysed by fear, murmuring against her, helpless in their sudden terror, another answered for them in a clear ringing voice, audible above it all and speaking to one heart there a message from the dead.

"The gates are closed," the voice said; "I can answer Madame la Marquise."

The throng divided to let the speaker pass. He advanced slowly to the throne.

And so Beatrice met Gaston face to face, and holding her hands out to him, he bent and kissed them humbly.

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CHAPTER XXX

THE GATES ARE CLOSED

THE Count took his place upon the daïs beside her, and without any preface he addressed the amazed throng before him.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is no time for words, and I will be brief enough. There is a mob at the gate of this house; and it is our business to keep it out. I ask those of you to whom the honour of women is dear to follow me to the courtyard. Madame, our hostess, will take the ladies to the upper rooms. Gentlemen, if we can hold this house for twenty hours, I promise you that General Bonaparte will hold it afterwards. If none will carry the news to him, I shall make myself the messenger; but it rests with you to say if France revenges or relieves us."

This was all—a soldier's blunt speech; and to the woman he loved an ardent look which expressed his devotion and a deeper understanding, claiming forgiveness. Within this room the scene might have dismayed the stoutest heart. For now that the first blank disbelief had passed, there mingled

with the sound of distant blows upon the gates, the hysterical sobs of driven women and the angry whisperings of men. Treachery was the note of much of it—few among the French did not believe that the woman had betrayed them. Her house was a trap, they said aloud ; they had been lured to it by artifice ; the Veronese were her friends. Some doubted if the Count were really with them ; while others, in the anger of resentment, would have killed her where she stood. This new danger was perceived by none more quickly than Count Gaston. Ashamed of his countrymen, he did not hide it from himself that their suspicions were not without justification ; and, acting upon an immediate purpose, he offered his arm to Beatrice and conducted her through the scowling company. Some have said of him that he was a born leader of men, though opportunities of leadership had rarely come to him, and certainly this night first displayed those qualities of courage and resource which afterwards were to write so fine a story in the history of Napoleon's campaigns. With a word here and a smile there, a gentle hand upon a woman's arm, a brief expression of hope to the timid, a look which the hostile could not mistake, he made for the open doors, knowing as he went that any accident, any blunder, might cost the life of the brave woman whose fingers touched his arm.

"Courage," he whispered to her ; "I believe in the best. Take the women to the upper rooms and await me there. We have closed the gates and hold them. If they cannot come in from the

river, the night is ours. Beatrice, we will win it together !”

Again he kissed her hands, and waiting while she ascended the stairs, he numbered the trembling, weeping women who followed her to the galleries above. When all were passed, and expectant men surrounded him, he addressed them for the second time.

“My friends,” he said, “I know what is in your thoughts. It is a lie, and you should be ashamed of it ! Madame la Marquise knows no more of this than the veriest stranger in Verona. If there is any among you who says she does, I am here to answer him.”

He waited for them, but none took up the challenge. A personal magnetism which few could resist, drew them towards him in obedience, as to the master of their lives and honour. “No, no,” said some ; “that is madness ;” and others took up the cry, murmuring amongst themselves, and bidding him hasten. He understood the spirit which animated them, and catching opportunity by the arms, he told them what he would do.

“We hold the garden quay,” he said, “and, unless the gate gives way, we shall succeed, gentlemen. I ask the youngest of you to stand with my men in the gardens. The others will hold the stairs here as they value their own lives and lives more dear to them. We fight for women and the honour of a city—there is nothing to be said beyond that, my friends !”

They answered him that where he would lead

they would follow ; and fifty being counted for the gardens, he entrusted the command within the house to Jerome, the laughing young officer of dragoons, and with the others at his heels he went out to the gardens.

Beatrice had led the women to one of the upper rooms of the house, from whose windows the streets of Verona could be seen and the river wind about them. Here, for a full hour, she watched the conflict. Courageous among brave women she has written it that nothing but the task which Gaston had entrusted her saved her real that night. Surrounded by a terrified, weeping throng, some praying, some hysterical, others in the paralysis of fear, there was no minute when her sweet voice was not lifted to encourage, breathe a word of hope and to comfort. Yet she deceived them—helped them by a surpassing *tour de force* of effort and self-command—for one moment did she deceive herself. The spectacle in the streets below, scenes focussed by torches' light in many a square and public place, said plainly, "This is the end ; the hour has come. She could but hope and pray, and count the minutes until the great gates burst in and the hungry flood should engulf them.

It was a night of early spring, with a new moon clear cut in a sky of promise. All the familiar outlines of fort and hill and bastion which guard the city stood up, blackly and boldly, against the cloudless horizon. But the city herself was bright

lighted from end to end, and, so viewed, its intricacies of street and alley and piazza could be followed as lines of fire in a shadow valley. About the Palace itself the scene was plainer and more dreadful. You could distinguish the square courtyard, with here and there a lantern swinging in the darkness ; the grey church, whose transepts touched the wall, was a ghostly outline above the nether obscurity ; and by these you marked the great gates and beyond them a thousand faces staring up with mad eyes and open mouths—torches uplifted to bear witness to the frenzy. A leaping, shouting, frantic mob, defied by the massive gates and hurling against them in vain ; its roars of hate and defiance rose and fell like tempestuous seas upon a beach, recoiling to break again with fiercer assault. Nor, even at this hour, were these people innocent of blood. From time to time, outposts of the mob sallied forth to distant houses of the known French, and dragging victims out, they carried them in triumph to the whirlpool of lust and slaughter. Beatrice, in spite of herself, had been the witness of these deeds ; she had seen the haggard faces of men as the crowd lifted them up ; she had heard their screams when the daggers touched their throats ; had turned from the sickening spectacle which the uplifted pikes made more horrible. And these were the more merciful deeds, for darker were done in distant streets and black alleys, where the shadows fell and the cries were muted. That midnight tocsin, never to be forgotten while the city had a history, had unleashed the hounds from many a foul den and

sent them tumultuously to their work. None was spared, neither sex nor age availed. The very children they dragged down and butchered in the sleep; the last cries of women were mocked by devils. Enough that any one was known for a word of kindness to the French, or any favour towards them—death was the sentence, the death which followed the shrieking fugitive to the garret or the cellar, chased him through the muddy gutters. He overtook him on the house-tops, found him at the altar's foot. And for the women a nameless fate, mercy neither for mother nor child.

These things Beatrice perceived, and told no word of them to the weeping women.

"They will never pass the gates," she said. "We have a brave heart beating for us—let us trust him, let us help him. It cannot be long now."

So she promised them; but the intolerable night had scarcely begun, and every minute of it was eternity of terror and doubt.

The great gates withstood the assault, and the impotent mob began to realise that it would never pass them. Ladders had been brought long ago, and the bolder climbed up and sat astride the lofty walls, cloaking the *chevaux de frise* with their jackets and firing down haphazard at the figures below. These were answered by ringing volleys which cleared the walls as a tree shaken of fruit, and sent the dead backward into the arms of those who climbed behind them. For old Jaincy was in the courtyard, and he had placed the fifty with a general's eye for co-

and attack. Every doorway round about the enclosed square had its little company of picked marksmen, kneeling or standing in the shelter of the porches, and when these men looked up over the high walls and the grisly pikes, they could distinguish in the shimmering glow of countless flares the windows of opposing houses and the faces staring down from them—the faces of old men and startled women, of the partisan and of those who were afraid to be awake.

No assault by ladder could appal Jaincy's fifty; but as the time passed, their confidence became less, and by here and there a low groan or a muttered oath spoke of the chance bullet and its success. But the gates held bravely, and for nearly an hour this fitful attack waxed and waned, reaping its harvest with grim laboriousness, and promising no issue. No second idea but that of the puny battering-ram appeared at first to inspire the mob or to divert the current of its attack. When some one, in a lull of the storm, named fire as a better weapon, he was laughed to scorn by the impetuous few—until, indeed, the argument became unanswerable and other throats took it up and tossed it from one to another as a ball is tossed by idling players. They had it now and licked their lips about it, crying, "Yes, burn them out—that's the way!"—and as zealous in their new activities as in the old, the quickest among them went scampering for faggot and truss, and soon a pile was reared and twenty torches thrust into it. How they cheered the leaping flames—with what vociferation they followed

it. But the gate of the Bernese Palace was five hundred years old, iron-bound and nailed, built of mighty beams, with other beams behind them. And the lambent tongues, singeing and licking about it, fell back upon the ill-made pile, as impotent as a "sesame" as the pikes before it.

Again the faggots were piled, again the trusses were heaped and fired, and greeted by throats grown hoarse in triumphant summons. A second time the gate defied it; and in the hush that followed, low above the oaths and threats a new cry was raised: "The river, the river! Go in by the river!" Men and lads running from a school at the word "Dismiss" fled as this frantic people at the unknown leader's command. Headlong, through lane and alley, they rushed towards the lazy Adige. Any craft served them—some in scows, some in barges, packed in serried ranks, many in fishing boats; crowded upon ferries, swarming like birds upon a drifting log, they put out upon the flood and made for the gardens of the Palace. Wonder, indeed, that none had thought of it before! Yes, they could pass in the gardens. There were but five hundred fops, silks and satins to keep them out; and ugly voices named the women who had gone in to that promiscuous masquerade. Yes, it was over now; they tried the poniard's edge and thought of the white throats awaiting them.

Now prior to all this, Sergeant Jaincy had instructed his men what they must do at the crisis, and never had man a better company. No snoring of the night disturbed this plain old soldier.

fogged that clear idea he had carried to the Palace. To entrench himself as he would have entrenched himself upon any field of battle was old Jaincy's unalterable purpose; and this had been done directly he came ashore, when he sent his corporals hurrying for pick and shovel.

"We must cut a trench, my lads—and devil take the roses that stand in the way of it! Let me see you work, like the good fellows you are! What will they say to us at Padua—to be butchered like sheep in a slaughter-house by yonder dirty mob? Let me see the spades fly and I'll promise the corks shall go after them! It is for the women, remember—that's something to make men of you to-night!"

The men had replied by taking spades in their hands and making the rich loam and the brown gravel fly before them. Soon upon that spot where roses and fuchsias and great scarlet begonia had rooted a deep pit was digged, and its far bank heaped high with the dank reeking earth. The congenial task gave light hearts and willing hands—and presently when the Count had gone in to take the major-domo into his confidence and ask for Giovanni Galla, lacqueys came with long goblets of wine, and secretly in the darkness a quasi carnival heralded the ambushade. Thereafter the men waited grimly, ignorant almost for what they waited, but wholly satisfied in the belief that the Count knew and that old Jaincy shared his knowledge. Some day, they said, threatened French comrades in the great house behind them. They would have stayed there a month, knee-deep in water, jest upon

their lips and courage at their hearts, if the tale were true. And they never doubted it—they heard of JaiNCY and they said, "All's well."

From time to time during the silent hour Count Gaston came out of the house to them and spoke a few cheery words or talked deeply with the sergeant. He was unwontedly grave, and when he remembered Giovanni Gallo, he seemed to reproach himself that he had left the youth alone when he quitted the Palace at dawn.

"The lad knew and has paid for his knowledge," he said to JaiNCY; "they took him for dead from his own room two hours ago. I have sent for the surgeon and there is some little promise—but it is plain, JaiNCY, we were right to come."

"I don't doubt it, Count—I have breathed in the air for days gone. But we'll do our best—and the General won't fail us. He never failed me yet, nor any man that waited him, Count. What I am asking is, when is the news to come there? If it goes by the Colonel's mouth, we look for snow at Whitsun and say it's coming. God hears me, I do believe he'd starve his own mother to get a step! It will go hard with yonder poor women if they look to Colonel Balland—and so I'd tell him to his face!"

"You shall have the opportunity if I can make for you, JaiNCY. Let us try to do the man justice—he has had a hard time here; and God never make him a statesman! I will not believe that a Frenchman could do so base a thing!"

"Nor I, Count—with reservations. Opinion is

good thing to take with you on the high-road ; but a quick horse is better if there are sick folk behind you. I don't believe myself that the Colonel's at headquarters—but if you say so, it is well enough."

"Without reservation, Jaincy?"

The old sergeant laughed.

"No, Count ; but with an eye to yonder bank."

They were both thinking the same thought, that one of them must cross the river and carry the news to Napoleon ; and in no coward's spirit, each wished that the other might go, believing that this garden was the place of danger. For that matter, they had begun to argue it when that first great outcry arose in the streets behind them, and the bells of Verona clanged the tocsin and the human hounds came out. Instantly men, whose neighbour was asleep, sprang up and seized their arms. This cry of battle electrified them. They would have run in a body to the courtyard but for Jaincy's uplifted arm.

"Back!" he roared ; "into the trenches with you ! Answer to your numbers. Not a word until you are spoken to—now !"

He numbered fifty of them and went at the double towards the courtyard. This was the moment when Gaston left him and approached my lady at the crisis of the night. But Jaincy led the men toward the gate and held it as we have seen ; and when next he returned to the river quay, there was no need either for silence or disguise. One by one, over the black water, that heterogeneous fleet drove boldly towards the

Palace and its open portals. Who could hold it? the mob argued, but the dandies in silks and satin? the cooks, the lacqueys in Madame's service? And they would make short work of such! It was pitiful to see the infuriated horde, some leaping to the banks, some in their frenzy swimming ashore, others dragged down in the *mêlée* to a death of agony beneath the very keel of the boats which had carried them. Not one among them had the wit to name an ambuscade; and when, out of the darkness, a French voice cried, "Make ready fire!" and a sheet of crimson flame ran along the water's edge, it was as though a visitation of God had fallen upon them. Headlong, backward no friend clutching the throat of friend, the strong trampling down the weak, they fought for the floating havens they had quitted so triumphantly. And steadily, relentlessly, the musket shots pursued them, rolling as low thunder over the waters and blotting out the spectacle with a heavy sulphurous smoke of guns.

There were few weapons other than poniards in the people's hands, for they had come out to *bravo's* work, and they looked for white throats and bared breasts whereon to write the story of their vengeance. The best of them carried pikes and pistols; but many of them were almost without arms; and so they found themselves raging and impotent upon the ships' decks, struggling for the puny cabins, or turning upon the very leaders who had cried, "To the river!" And in this disorder they fled from the place, leaving behind

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The ambushade by the river.

them their drifting dead and those worming figures upon the quay which answered for Jaincy and his hundred.

During the long night the attack droned on, waking sometimes to a new and fierce assault at the great gates or hurling its errant shot at the hidden trenches of the garden quay. Within the house, the tidings alternated, being now of promise now of despair, so that the spirit of the defenders rose and fell as the hush and the violence of tempests upon an Eastern sea. When dawn broke, it found weary men lying upon the marble staircase of the Palace in every posture of distress and fatigue. Those fine dresses—the pride of yesternight—were to-day the mocking emblems of humbled vanity. Gallants were gallants no longer, but white-faced doubters who asked almost with the minutes, "Shall we be relieved?" The more courageous related the situation in simple words. There were five thousand Italian troops upon the hills about Verona. Bonaparte must pass by those before he could come in. All depended, they said, upon his view of it. He would care nothing that a few thousand of his countrymen might perish if their death would give him an excuse for Europe. "See how my people are treated!" he would say. "I shall deal with these Italians as traitors and assassins." And if such were his intention, what hope could there be that he would hasten? He had no more than six thousand troops at Padua; with these he must confront Emili and the soldiers of the

Republic ; and be sure, they said, that no emergency would be allowed to change his plans or hasten his dispositions. So the daylight found pale faces in the balance, and none paler than my lady when Gaston came up to her from the garden at the hour of five o'clock, and taking her aside in an upper gallery spoke intimately to her for the first time since he had left her at Bovole.

"I have come to say goodbye to you," he said, "but I cannot go until I know that you understand."

There was no need to tell her that he remembered the days in Bianca's house, and spoke with regret of them. She so understood him, and laid a gentle hand upon his arm.

"Since you have come to me, do not share with me by that," she rejoined almost in a whisper, "Understanding has been difficult, Gaston—but it will never be difficult again. I am learning of my life new lessons every day. Help me to do what you would wish."

He stooped and kissed her forehead.

"I cannot teach you, Beatrice, unless you make me worthy. When all this is over, we will begin our lesson together, and our hearts shall help us. I am going to Bonaparte to tell him what you have done for him, and what his countrymen owe to you to-night. Beatrice, I cannot let all the sacrifices be yours. Yes, I know what it must cost you to be here—I know what you gave up for me when you left Venice. These things are never to be forgotten by a man who loves you. I know that

life has been selfish and vain; but the years to come shall atone."

His confession distressed her, and she trembled when he spoke of going to Bonaparte.

"Gaston, there is atonement enough. Are you not here with me? Whom have I if you go? Does the lesson teach us this, that each day brings farewell? No, no! let another go—you cannot leave me! Why must it be you?" and then she asked with pathetic earnestness, "Are you the only one?"

"I would have sent Jaincy," he interrupted, fearing her entreaties, "but they have hurt him, and there is no other we can trust. Beatrice, do you realise what must be if help does not come to us to-day? I shall cross the river and ride for all that is dear to me on earth. If I fail—well, it's better to fail like that than here with my own reproaches, and a voice to say to me 'If you had gone——!' Think of that, dear love. Remember my responsibility; the streets below with their dreadful story. Would a man worthy of you stand by indifferently? No! you cannot say it."

She avoided his question, referring again to his farewell at Bovoleta.

"You left me, and were to return in an hour," she said. "I remember that morning so well. Yes, you sent a strange messenger, Gaston. Are you sure that he will come a second time?"

He laughed at the remembrance, looking deep into the eyes which reproached him.

"He would not spare me; I begged grace, if it

were but for an hour. He believed that I could save Verona—and this is how I have done it! Yes, it is my destiny to fail—and God knows what will change it. I came here with fine notions—peace and conciliation and friendship. They answered me with stones. In your own Venice I tried to bring about a better understanding between the two nations. How did it end? That I fled like a thief, leaving a bitter legacy of hate and distrust behind me."

"Which you owe to Joseph Villetard," she said, a cloud upon her face. "Yes, Gaston, the shadow of that man has been upon our lives—I feel it here to-night; even now, when you say that you must leave me. There is no misfortune of ours which he has not brought upon us. And you go to him at Padua—you believe still that he is your friend. He would not contradict her."

"There are two Villetards, Beatrice; one is the friend of France, the other is my friend. I will make him prove it to you. When I arrive at Padua I shall put the General upon his honour, and take witnesses with me. I don't think there is any danger. The boats can put me across, and the road is open afterwards. I am an old hand in an enemy's country; besides, this is not the moment when a man counts his chances."

The old Gaston spoke again; the man whom a cry of danger could call out and no adventure appalled, if it were worthy of his name. Beatrice perceived that he had but one idea: to cross the river and alarm the camp at Padua; but

was the wiser, and when a little spell of silence had passed, she said to him—

"A wise man counts his chances always—for himself and others. Are you sure that you must go alone, Gaston—is the road open but for one? Can nothing be done for these poor people? Ask yourself before it is too late. They relied upon our honour. Have we nothing else to say to them but 'wait'?"

It was so new to him, bringing about such a volte-face of plan and intention that he regarded her with astonished eyes, as though a wizard had spoken it into his ears.

"Do you mean that I am to take them with me?"

"I mean that you shall think of it. If you can cross the river safely, Gaston, why not others? Ah, yes; you had not considered it, but will do so now. They look to us, dear love—we cannot leave them. Let them find a little pity in a brave man's heart—they need it, God knows!"

She shuddered at her own terrible thoughts, and pressed both his hands in hers in a mute appeal, which seemed to reproach his tardiness. The truth was that the courage of her idea stupefied him. What was against her plan? They had the French cutters at the quay. Why should not these weeping women and the men who trusted him go with him to Bonaparte's camp? Truly, he had not thought of it; but now the plan gripped him wholly in its obviousness.

"I will see Jaincy," he cried, striding from the room.

She waited with beating heart, praying, and for all who depended upon his answer.

Old Jaincy had a bullet in the ankle, and he lay on the grass by the trenches alternately sipping water from a great goblet and cursing the Veronese in three languages. Having expressed the desire to be patient, and informed the nearest to him that the citizens were the fathers and the mothers of dogs, he called upon strange names of gods and saints to bear witness to his misfortune; and in this employment the Count found him when he returned to the gardens, full of my lady's plan. The vitality of this new idea, so greatly daring and so simple, drew tears from the old man's eyes and silenced the narration of his own misfortunes.

"God be good to me, I am not fit to kiss the hem of her garment," he said when Gaston had done. "Certainly they can go, Count. And wooden heads we must have been not to think of it. Help me to my feet that I may find my wits. No, I must be up and doing—the longest devil in hell take the man who sits me down when I want my legs so badly. She says that the fort will protect us—so will bless her sweet heart; and that's more than any among us has had the sense to think of to-day. You join me a moment to think, Count—and use to bring the people together, but not here until we're ready for them. We'll sleep at Padua to-night if there's any courage amongst us."

The Count laughed at his frank admissions concerning their oversight, and forbidding him to go

up he returned to marshal the guests and servants within the house ; while Jaincy, writhing impotently, racked his good brains for the complement of that idea which a clever woman had put to them so cleverly. That the river was to be crossed, and safely crossed, he could doubt no longer. But it was in his head that the dangers of the attempt might be lessened by a stratagem—and in the quest of that he thought of his wound and all that preceded it. It was a quarter of four of the morning at this time, and day had broken with a gentle drizzle of rain and heavy clouds rolling up from the west. Some of the boats which had attacked the Palace so valiantly still drifted to and fro upon the stream ; but their occupants had no heart for a new assault, and they appeared to be waiting rather as spectators of what was happening ashore than as participators in any plan of assault. The plain truth was that this mob, like other mobs, had no stomach for any work wherein its own precious life was to be sacrificed, and directly it was discovered that armed men were attacking the Bernese Palace, from that moment the bravest of the assailants sought more congenial opportunities less hazardous. After all, they were not French enough in these undefended streets, and even in the churches they were not glory and the baser passions to be satisfied more readily when the shrieking victims fled headlong to their doom, and the open doors admitted to pillage and worse. And so, one by one, the rogues deserted the obstinate gate which had so long defied them, and breaking up into little companies they

went roaring through the streets on madder quests, but always with poniards in their hands. Within the Palace the truce was made known rather by the cessation of that tempest of voices than by any sure knowledge of what was happening outside; but the boats were still visible to those who guarded the river quay; and old Jaincy made his comrades lift him up that he might count them before he would say, "It shall be done thus and thus."

"It must be by stratagem, my lads—and the sooner the better. Look you now, they'll have muskets amongst them by this time, and when we declare ourselves they'll not be backward; rely upon it! It is in my mind that we should not wait for them to begin when the time for music comes. I'll have a dozen of you volunteer for the hot corner—not so loudly, but with good hearts. There will be plenty for us to do, and you won't forget that women are going aboard. Now let me see you pick and choose amongst themselves; and remember that those that are quick to go may be long time coming back again."

He had given them some idea to begin with what his purpose was; and when they understood that one of the cutters must become a decoy, and being rowed up the river, as though to return to the Castle of St. Felix, must draw the fire upon itself while the other boats carried their defenceless crew to the distant bank, they vied with each other volunteering for the dangerous places, and insisted that it should be by lot and not by any preference. Those who drew the shorter grasses, with which the

lots were cast, were like boys who had won a race game, or carried the prize from many competitors ; but Jaincy solaced the others with promises of blood and wounds ; and when the Count returned he found the cutters ready, the men standing to their arms, and the sergeant safely at the tiller of the leading boat.

"A lame man can speak if he cannot walk, Count," said Jaincy spiritedly enough. "We shall drive the cutter round the bend of the river, and while we are there you lose no time behind us. Get the people across, but don't sink your boats. If they've any eyes up yonder at the Castle, they'll know what we are doing and help us. I have taken it upon me to be a little before you ; it is wiser so, for you'll find me a burden ashore. If it should be that we do not come back at all—well, luck go with you on the road, and my good wishes, sir. But I'm not looking for that," he added cheerfully ; "I believe in our lucky star, and it's up to-day, Count."

He held out a rough hand and the Count gripped it fervently. Through many a difficult day had these two toiled side by side, stood together in many a fearful place, at one in their devotion to the name of Bonaparte. This night and its dangers seemed as some necessary crisis in lives where all was hazard and doubt, and each believed, perhaps, that the old good fortune would stand with him despite that moment of remembered comradeship and the pathos of farewell. So they shook hands upon it, and with one brief glance behind him, Jaincy cried, "Give way, my lads !" and the boat shot out into

the river, and well-pulled oars drove it headlong toward the fortress.

Now, the news had gone out to Beatrice's guests that a supreme effort was being made on their behalf and that its success depended not a little upon their own courage and resource. For that matter, the Count himself had been the messenger, and going from room to room among the stricken women and the silent men, touching them upon the shoulder and telling them with cheering hope of that which was to be attempted, he led them down to the gardens as a company quitting a prison, but going, it knew not whither. Many of them, indeed, had come to believe that the end was here in this doomed palace, and, be it in one hour or in two, the gates must be broken in and the final horror consummated. Patient they had been—not a few of them resigned; but none so bold as to believe in those vain promises of relief by Bonaparte, or any arm from without. And now a man appeared among them who said, "It may be! We have a plan. Help us by your silence and obedience." If they stared at him with dazed eyes, some of them awakened from sleep to hear this message, others loosed from the arms of friends, young girls clinging hysterically to women who could not comfort them, this new desire of liberty cast fatigue behind them and sent them, a timid, halting group, to the thickets of the garden. Yes, they began to perceive the notion now, and a hundred voices said, "The river—we are to cross the river!" a hundred ha-

indicated the waiting boats. Was it possible, after all, that this great barrier of the lazy waters should bid them pass in safety; this barrier which had seemed to hem them in so surely, to pen them for the assassin's knife? It might be so, the men said; the women prayed for it, and heedless of bedraggled gowns and towzled hair and the chilling rain which fell upon their wan faces, they followed the Count to the water's edge and asked him what they should do.

The cutter, which old Jaincy named the *Stratagem*, had rounded the bend by this time, and it was hidden from observation by the lofty houses which bordered the river bank. In so far that it had served for a decoy to draw rifle fire from the insurgents, its purpose was successful, for it had scarcely disappeared when repeated volleys were to be heard by those on shore, and the smoke from heated rifles came drifting down on the morning breeze. Such a rattle of musketry continuing with scarcely any intermission said that Jaincy's musketeers at least were holding their own; but welcome as this intimation might be, it added little to the Count's satisfaction when he perceived that other craft, drawn by the reports, were putting out from wharf and quay, and hurrying to the scene of action. No time, evidently, must now be lost. The precious minutes were slipping away one by one.

"We must go, Jerome," he said to the young officer at his side. "It is all or nothing. Get your people on board and show us the way. I will satisfy the curiosity of yonder ruffians by a little music.

Take advantage of it and make straight for the shore. There is not a minute to lose."

The young Frenchman nodded his head, and taking a dozen musketeers with him in the boat, he turned and beckoned the foremost of the women to step on board. For the most part mere girls, who for weeks past had spoken or thought of little but the festivities, the flirtations and the successes which the Bernese Palace had in store for them, dawned on them found them red-eyed and trembling, the shivering children of a dreadful fear; who had never known the meaning of death, but had realised it in one never-to-be-forgotten instant. No words could describe that mingled hope and doubt which possessed them when they entered the second of the boats, and the grim musketeers helped them aboard, and their rough voices bade them be of good cheer. All the scene, the swirling river, the cold sky, the palace behind them, the echo of rifle shots, even the most horrible death-cries of human beings hunted in the dark places of the city, cowed their hearts and prepared them for the worst. And now the boat was cast adrift, the gentle waves caught it, the swish of oars was to be heard, and altogether the lusty rowers with one cry of triumphant defiance drove onward to the shore and the safety it promised.

Many watched the boat with anxious eyes, but none with more satisfaction than the crew of a ferry boat put out suddenly from the quay beneath the Castle of St. George, and peopled from stem to stern with the fiercest desperadoes of that night of horrors.

These men had been carousing in a tavern upon the river's bank, but the musket shots and the uproar called them out, greedy for new draughts of life. They took in the situation at a glance, and said the dandies were crossing at last. Pell-mell upon this they tumbled into the ferry-boat, warped to the quay; and driving her with poles and oars they fell upon the cutter at the very moment when its safe passage seemed assured. The audacity of the attack and its apparent success drew allied cowards from their lairs; solitary ruffians in skiffs and scows; tipsy *bravi* from the tavern's kitchen, and others who had no heart for an attack upon the first of the cutters. These cried the news that women were crossing the river, and believing that the second of the boats would be lightly defended, they rowed towards it, shouting fiercely—like a horde of pirates overwhelming a treasure-ship. Now it seemed, indeed, that old Jaincy and his stratagem were of little use—for here was the long-boat surrounded by yelling devils, its musketeers firing wildly while the danger blinded them; here were mere girls clinging to each other as in an embrace of death—and yonder upon the shore the agonised French crying loudly, "Go on—go on!" and over the whole river the blue smoke and the flashing fire and the muggy haze of combat. Then was the moment when the Count said that all was lost; but he misjudged the veterans and the laughing Jerome, who egged them on with wild cries, grey beards full of fine oaths and grim determination whom even the women could praise. True that

the first swift attack had found them wild in their aim and over zealous to be doing; but when the rush of it was spent and the sterner moment came the old habit of good order returned to them and they fought in the longboat as steadily as on any heights which Bonaparte held for them.

"Steady, my lads!" was little Jerome's word. They answered, "Ay, steady, Captain"; and taking good aim and husbanding their shot they began to pick the ruffians off. It was no new thing to such men as these that the comrade next to them should start up wildly with the death-cry on his lips, that his neighbour should shiver and grow cold when the musket fell from his stiffened hand. Such was the price of passage; but the women whom the boat sheltered, the huddled mass of white faces and trampled gowns; of silk and velvet and tattered lace of bared arms and rounded white necks and jewelled glistening amid the heap, these and this unnerved them. The hand upon the trigger trembled, the bullet skimmed vainly over the frothing water when a young girl's plaintive voice sobbed out the story of her wounds. With such sights and sounds there were unfamiliar. The trust appalled them, and upon that again, it hardened them, so that, in the end they fought like devils and even the *bravi* fell back.

It is to be imagined with what agitation those who had been left behind followed this changing balance of fortunes and the peril of their comrades who had left them with such brave hopes. But very few of Beatrice's guests were on board

cutter, and the majority shivered in the drizzling rain, powerless to help and well aware of its own danger. As for Count Gaston, he had never known a day in his life which demanded such resolution or put upon him such a burden of responsibility. Whether to follow the hard-pressed boat or to abandon the scheme and to continue to hold the Palace, this was the question which he must answer, and he alone. Beatrice herself could but say, "Act as you think best, Gaston." His French comrades had no other counsel. The lacqueys were stricken dumb—decision lay with him alone.

"If we could signal the fort!" he would say from time to time; "good God! why do they not hear us! Has Emili come in, then, or what is it?" And then of the men he would ask, "What shall we do, my lads? You see how it is; we are bartering our lives—will you go or stay?"

They answered in a body that it were wiser to go; and when he turned and looked at those about him, and observed Beatrice's mute appeal and heard the sobs of women, it seemed, indeed, that the bitterest hour of his life had come. For this must be the reproach, that if he failed to cross the river, those who gave no counsel would say, "You could have held the palace;" while if the palace were lost, they would charge him that he would have crossed the river.

"We go," he cried to them at last, "and God help us! Let the boats be manned. My friends, I count upon you all. There is no other way than this."

The men heard him with relief, the women with resignation. Better the known than the unknown, the race for freedom than this weary watching upon shore. It needed all his wit to restrain the veterans, anxious for the honours; but he numbered them sternly, and recovering his nerve at the call of action he helped twenty of the women into the third of the cutters and so sent her out. There remained but one boat and two hundred ashore praying for places in her. When she had her human cargo and the disappointed drew back uncomplainingly to a vigil which must be terrible, he turned to Beatrice and asked her if she would go.

"There is one place yet," he said; "it will be easier now, Beatrice—you know that I wish it."

She shook her head.

"No," she whispered to him; "we will go together, Gaston—it must be that."

The boats put out; and just as new victims in an arena were of old time greeted by the huzzas of the mob, so did the fierce shouts from the attacking boats welcome these new objects of the insurgents' desire. Roaring like savages (for the most part of them had been unable to approach the second of the cutters, so great was the press about it) they fell upon this feeble enemy; and altogether, like a fleet of desperadoes whom chance has rewarded, they cried that it was the end. This was the moment when none of those who watched the spectacle from the shore could believe in any other issue than that of the ultimate doom; perchance the merciful death which the river might bestow. But in this reckon-

ing one vital fact was missing. The fort of St. George, so long silent and asleep—ay, it heard them now! As a storm breaking in the heavens and drowning by its thunders the voices of men below, so did the sudden volcano of the great guns overwhelm that clamour upon the river, and hold the attention of every combatant. There was no prudence, it may be, no clear discernment on the gunner's part between friend and enemy, Veronese or French; but perceiving that which was astir, advised that the riot had spread, even to the river, the commander of the fort fired blindly at the tangled fleet below his ramparts, and the very first shot clove the ferry-boat in half and sent its crew shrieking to the waves. Thereafter the balls fell like hail in springtime—some mockingly in deserted waters, some plunging in the gardens of the Palace, others hissing in the hearts of gigantic whirlpools, but with terror about them—so that no trumpet calling an army to halt could have commanded a silence more impressive. Little wonder that all other sounds ceased, even the laments of the wounded; or that in the solemn truce, when the boats drifted without helmsmen and the smoking rifles were laid upon battered gunwales, each asked himself, "What next?"

Such was the first of the miracles; the second trod close upon its heels, no less wonderful or amazing to those who witnessed it with broken prayers upon their lips.

At the crisis of the truce, a solitary boat, rowed by an old man, a woman at the tiller of it, rounded the

bend whereby you gain the Castle of St. Felix ; and holding a straight course, almost unobserved amid the press, the woman in the boat began to exhort all she passed by to save themselves ; for, said she, Bonaparte is in the city. This news spreading as a pestilence—man shouted it to man and boat to boat, until, in one mad panic, the rowers caught it up and made headlong for the land. Schooled by long months of humiliation and distress to fear this name more than that of god or devil, there was not one in all the fleeing company to ask, "Are these things true, with what authority does this woman come to us ?" It was all a race now—the strong before the weak, the wounded to the waves, if a harbour could be gained the sooner and the city's caves open their dark doors to Verona's assassins. And so quickly they went, so dreadful was their fear that almost before the French had dared believe in other than a ruse, there remained upon the river's breast none but their own ships drifting conspicuously through the rising clouds and bearing their precious burdens unobstructed to the friendly shore.

Yes, a woman had saved them, and Gaston alone could name her. He told them that she was Bianca, Pesaro's daughter, and said that her wife had contrived this stratagem to save them. And so my lady bowed her head, and forgot for ever that this woman had wronged her.

The Commander of the Castle of St. George, the recipient of orders from Colonel Balland to confine his men to barracks if rioting should occur in the

streets of Verona, had not been prepared for that grim tragedy which befell at the Bernese Palace. To this reason is attributed his long silence when firing began upon the river, and the strictures passed upon his inhumanity by those who considered themselves the victims of it. To give him his due, he acted with zeal enough when the situation was made known to him ; and having fired upon the assassins from the heights, he sent two hundred and fifty of his best men to the river's bank to insure the transit of the cutters and to escort the precious lives snatched from the very jaws of the nameless death. Guarded by these riflemen, and protected by the cannon of the castle, that strange company of old and young, of princes and of priests, of masters and of servants, was gathered at length upon the friendly shore, and led in elegant disorder to the gates of the fortress. But the last to cross was Count Gaston, and my Lady Beatrice was at his side.

She had not suffered it without a question, and first had asked him of the youth Giovanni, whom they named among the dead. In this, however, they erred, as the surgeon hastened to tell them. Giovanni lived and would recover ; and when gentle hands had carried him to the water's edge, Beatrice at length embarked with Gaston at her side ; and together in the last of the cutters, the last to leave the gardens, they looked back upon that forsaken house of their misfortunes and heard the fierce voices which proclaimed its destruction. For Verona's mob had long been aware of what was doing upon the river's bank, and bold as rogues

ever are when none opposes them, they swarmed across the walls as the boats departed and soon were pillaging to their hearts' content, amid those splendid relics of the centuries. That brutal sack, that crash of door and window, the triumphant cries echoed across the water like an empty threat which yet had a sting in it—and for Beatrice, if not for Gaston, this final humiliation could bring tears to her eyes where graver perils had left her cold.

"So ends my dynasty," she said, putting a hand in his and turning away her face that he might not find her weeping. "It could not have been otherwise," she added with a deep sigh. "I do not altogether blame these people, Gaston. My country has suffered much, and has been very patient. I, at least, will not consent to witness its suffering any more."

"You shall not, Beatrice," he answered her; "we have the world before us. Sometimes I think that all this failure and humiliation and pain must come some day in every life. It is the winter of the mind and the spring follows upon it surely. We do not know ourselves truly until we have lived in the valley—but the heights are always ours if we will climb. I shall take you to Rome as you wish—neither Venice nor Verona can ever be a home to you again."

"And you," she asked him with gentle sadness "you with your ambitions and your loyalty—your duty to a great cause—what world is open to you Gaston, but the world a great man makes for? Yes I know he is that; I realise his genius. Had w

been as wise a people as we are generous, we should be his allies to-day, and all this would have been spared us. It is our destiny to be one race and many nations. And we must pay in bitterness the price that no nation pays and lives. Go back to him, dear friend, and forget that I have lived. Duty asks it of you——"

"And you—do you ask that of me, Beatrice?" he cried, interrupting her passionately, "say it and I will believe. No, your silence tells me. What is ambition, what is country if a man's heart be void? Shall I live for France when my heart is in Rome, and every dawn I must cast my eyes toward the South and say, my life is there. Not so—the lesson has been too well learned. Where you go, there my road lies. Forbid me, and I follow where your eyes shall not see me, but your heart shall know. Be silent and night nor day shall find us apart. Ah, you cannot say it—my beloved, I claim you now, and the years shall witness my gratitude!"

He bent and kissed her hands. Behind them lay the still waters and the flaming palace and the terror of the city. But the heights awaited them, and the green hills wherefrom they could see the road of their desire.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE MOMENTOUS HOUR

TWENTY-FOUR hours after the last shot had been fired by the insurgents in the streets of Verona, Joseph Villetard, the emissary, walked to and fro in the courtyard of the Duca! Palace at Padua, and declared by every question and gesture his anxiety to know what was happening within that splendid mansion.

It was a momentous day, and the ambassador from Venice had been closeted with Bonaparte for a full hour and were not yet dismissed. Such *aides-de-camp* and other messengers as went to and fro between the audience chamber and the distant camp were bearers of common orders and could tell the excited emissary nothing of Bonaparte's mind nor give him any hint which would help him to a conclusion. For that which Villetard desired to know so ardently was his master's pleasure concerning Venice and her government. Would it be sack and pillage for that city of the waters—or a vulgar surrender of flag and fort rewarding none and satisfying no vengeance. Villetard did not believe

that it would be so. He had laid his mine too surely—first in the letter from Venice describing the wrongs and sufferings of his fellow-countrymen; again in the daily taunt, "The honour of the army demands it;" finally in the preparation of that dastardly conspiracy which cost the lives of two thousand French in Verona and remains one of the bloodiest crimes in history. No, indeed, Joseph Villetard feared no opposition.

This had been the purpose of his life since Bonaparte first chose him from many among the Directory to be his emissary to the Venetians and to bring about their submission. The months of waiting had been long; but the patience of this singular man was inexhaustible, and to-day he believed it would be rewarded. There, within the Palace, were the Lord of Brescia, greatly fallen, Pesaro weeping tears of shame, Renaldi white with anger—the Doge's messengers begging salvation upon their knees. Who could doubt what answer Bonaparte could make to them? From time to time, indeed, his voice was heard through the open windows, loud in anger and denunciation. When the hush came, there followed that most pathetic of all human expressions of grief, the convulsive sobs of a brave man pleading for his country. Villetard hugged himself when he heard this—and chancing to meet General Moreau in the courtyard, he asked him for the tidings, and gloated on them.

"We are to march at dawn," the General said; "I don't think anything can prevent that. Balland

goes to Verona with ten thousand men—they will be ample. We shall meet with no opposition, for the Doge is already packing and the Senate follows him, they tell me. I am hoping for a little moderation still—and after all, there is only one Venice, Chevalier."

"True, true," replied Villetard, with a soft smile—"moderation, of course, General. They must not burn the pictures, for instance. We want them in Paris—there is a Titian at the Palazzo Burano I intend for myself. Keep an eye upon it if you can. But seriously, there must be no more nonsense. We can have no more trouble down yonder—there has been too much already."

General Moreau nodded his head.

"It is quite at an end," he said decisively; "the men march at dawn, and you know what that means. But I shall exercise my authority if I can," he added a little sharply—and then, "by the by, do you know that your friend, the Count, is down at the inn of the Golden Horns? We all thought him dead—I am just going to tell the General."

Villetard was much astonished, for he, also, had heard that Gaston had perished in the riot at Verona—and now he expressed the genuine pleasure of a man who hears good news of his friend.

"You don't say so, Moreau—I could have heard nothing so welcome. At the inn of the Golden Horns—I shall go down at once!"

"And present my compliments—to Madame la Marquise also."

"Do you mean that she is with the Count?"

"They tell me so—and, of course"—he ran on lightly—"there always is a woman."

Villetard's face fell, and his chagrin was not to be concealed.

"True," he said; "but this woman is eminently dangerous just now, Moreau. The General likes her—she has a ready wit—I would have given a thousand louis not to have heard your news!"

"Then consider it unspoken," rejoined Moreau with a laugh—and so he entered the Palace.

Villetard continued to pace the courtyard with restless steps and the air of a man who has received a blow. True, he could admit that his own fears magnified the ill; and that no woman living could save Venice now—but the lurking suspicion agitated him, and he devised a hundred pretexts for keeping his friend Gaston from the General. Unable, however, to choose one of them before the others, he was about to ride away to verify the news for himself when the great gate of the Palace opened and the Venetian ambassadors passed out. So plainly did their faces tell the story of their grief, so cast down and humbled they were, that the Chevalier instantly dismissed his own perplexities and declared that the day was won.

"So ends the farce," he cried. The cry was still upon his lips when Bonaparte himself followed the ambassadors to the door and addressed a final word to them.

"Gentlemen," he said, "my quarrel is with Venice, not with you. If you will accept my hospitalities, I offer them to you respectfully. Pray

consider this Palace your own. You have ridden far and will need refreshment."

Renaldi, with the tears still upon his cheek, bowed his head gravely, and declared it his intention to return as he had come. Lorenzo, the magnificent, trailing his gown on the dust, trembled like a man smitten by an ague—Pesaro thanked the General and excused himself. Alone among them to carry himself with dignity, he answered Bonaparte boldly—

"I receive no hospitalities from, nor offer them to the enemies of my country."

So they drove away in a heavy coach to the inn where their horses were stabled; while Bonaparte, standing for a little while as one in a reverie, turned anon to the Chevalier and asked him for what he was waiting. Villetard, guarded always, replied that he waited for news of his General's success.

"Is it so, General—are we to march at dawn?"

"At dawn," Napoleon said.

"Thank God," echoed Villetard piously, "the day of vacillation is over."

"Thank rather your opportunities," Napoleon rejoined; and then with an abrupt turn he said—

"I go down to the Inn of the Golden Horns—ride so far with me, Chevalier."

Villetard looked up at the flashing black eyes as a man who would question if he dared; but something in Bonaparte's tone, a note almost of defiance, forbade him; and without a word he waited for the horses and followed his master to the inn. This, he said, was the most critical hour of that year

of crisis. And, for once, he, Villetard, was powerless. He knew that he would not be heard.

"There always is a woman," he had said, it seemed but a few days ago, to his friend Gaston; and that woman Bonaparte would find at the Inn of the Golden Horns. The Lady Beatrice, indeed, thought of Rome no longer, nor turned her eyes to the Holy City as a haven of rest. The same destiny which thwarted the peril at Verona sent her, at Gaston's bidding, to seek out the Master of Italy in the palace at Padua, and to avert, if her wit could avert it, the supreme misfortune which awaited Venice and her country. Grown shrewd in danger, Count Gaston here found that final opportunity by which he would make her desires his own, and winning her liberty gain also a measure of grace for Venice, which would be both her reward and his own.

"To Rome if you will," he had said to her upon that morning when they quitted Verona together, and looked for the last time upon the blackened ruins of the palaces wherein they had dreamed the dreams, "to Rome if you will; while Venice perishes and there is none to say 'This thing need not be.'" She heard him with bent head and beating heart, for she knew that his rebuke was just, and that hers must be the voice which would plead with Bonaparte.

"Women do not count in war," she had said; "who am I that your General will hear me?"

"One whom all men hear gladly," he answered—and then, "it is a children's game, Beatrice, though it

be played with human lives, over the children's hearts and homes. Go to him because there are homes to save in Venice, and children to kiss the hand that befriended them. How will your conscience be satisfied if you turn from this? Do you owe Venice nothing that your voice alone is silent to-day?"

She heard him patiently when he went on to tell her that if Venice were occupied by French troops, at least the greater disasters of her folly might be spared her. "Go to the General and say that his name will profit by mercy. It is an argument he will hear from your lips. We shall find him at Padua, and he will not refuse me the opportunity I desire. Afterwards you shall be your own mistress, Beatrice. My task ends when I bring you to Bonaparte."

She smiled now at his artlessness, knowing well how much his love for her, and how little his pity for Venice dictated this appeal. Did she go to Padua, and win mercy for her country, the rest were obvious. She would become Gaston's wife. There could be no alternative—and understanding this, she followed him in silence; while to his men he said, "We go to Padua, to the Inn of the Golden Horns."

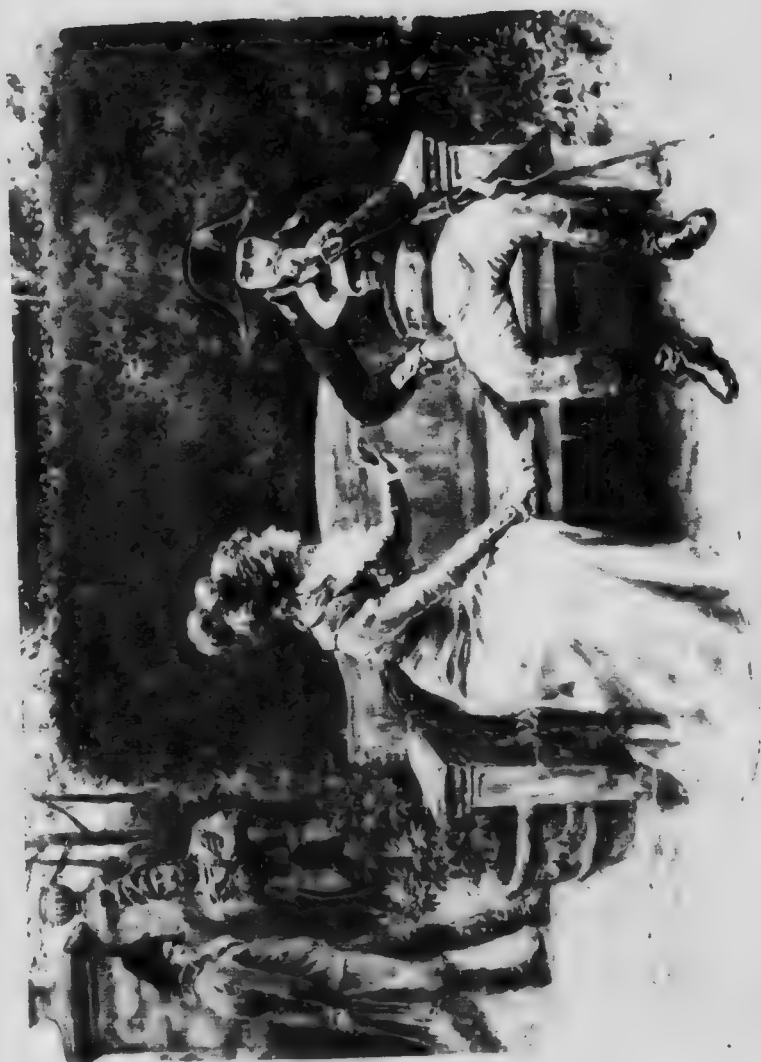
They made the journey without incident, and had scarcely passed the gates of the town when Gaston sent word to Bonaparte and implored an audience for Madame la Marquise de St. Remy. The answer to this was Bonaparte's message to the amiable Villetard, "I go down to the Inn of the Golden Horns," he had said. Well did the Chevalier understand what that visit implied, and ironical were his reflections.

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Portrait of a Woman

Count Gaston stood at the door of the inn when his General arrived, and the meeting between the two men was almost that of brother meeting brother upon a morning of rejoicing. They embraced tenderly, and in a few brief sentences expressed, the one his pleasure, the other his devotion. And from that Bonaparte went on to ask of Beatrice. Was it well with her? Had she suffered any hurt upon that terrible night? She had done great things for the French in Verona, he admitted, and he would thank her himself if she would permit him. The Count answered that Beatrice was then in the gardens of the inn, resting after her journey—he knew with what pleasure she would receive one whom she esteemed so highly; and so, without further preface, Bonaparte went to her.

It was two hours before he returned—leaving behind him the salvation of that city for which a woman had striven so heroically and patiently through the terrible days.

Yes, Beatrice had won mercy for her beloved Venice. Standing there in the gardens, with the roses and the jasmine about her, her auburn hair flashing in the sunlight, her eyes looking deep into the eyes of the man whom Europe had learned to fear, she asked him, "How will your name be judged when this thing is done? What profit will you have when the glory of the ages is but dust and posterity buries your name amid the ashes of Venice? Spare this fallen people," she had pleaded; "let it be said of you that Venice is built anew by your victories. You can never undo that

which will be done to-morrow, my lord," she had said; "as Nero burned the brand upon his grave, so would you brand France with the iron of this shame. To-day there is time—I pray God to-morrow may not be too late!"

Her voice was as sweet music to him. Her praise intoxicated him. This little jewel of Venice, could he not spare it from his crown? And was there not here a white breast upon which it might shine gloriously? What mattered it to him if the houses of this little people stood or fell? He was a gambler throwing down a silver piece to gratify a beautiful woman—her rhetoric delighted him as the tones of an exquisite instrument. Yes, he would give her a measure of grace for Venice and kiss her hands. It had been his oath but yesterday that he would raze the city to the ground. A nation found salvation in that brief moment.

And so to horse again, and at the Palace the new order, signed by General Bonaparte—

"The Count of Joyeuse is made Governor of Venice. The Lady Beatrice goes with him."

None was before the Chevalier Villetard bending the knee to my lady in her victory.

In Gaston's arms, Beatrice told the story—

"I have saved my people—my heart is at rest. Oh, my beloved, bid me sleep!"

He kissed her lips, and for answer called her his sweet wife.

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